MOUNDVILLE VISITORS ENLIGHTENED THROUGH ANCIENT POTTERY pg. 5

Forecast for Spring 2017: A University of Alabama Bioblitz
It’s a Dinosaur! It’s a Mosasaur! No! It’s a Whale! ALMNH’s Basilosaurus Whale
Discovering Alabama and the Big Whooper - Whooping Cranes in Alabama
An Afternoon with Amelia Gorgas, Her Friends and Family
Published periodically during the year by The University of Alabama Museums

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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On the cover: Moundville Archaeological Park visitors interact with a “please touch” area of the Jones Museum.
**Summer 2016 EVENTS CALENDAR**

**may**

21 Saturday
**SATURDAY IN THE PARK**
Free with paid admission, Mica Art and Ornamentation with Tammy Beane, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

28 Saturday
**BIRDFEST!**
Moundville’s West Alabama Birding Trail Event, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

**july**

8 Friday
**SHARK TOOTH CREEK**
$25 or $20 with UA Museums membership, ages 10 and up, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

9 Saturday
**BEAR CREEK CANOEING**
$25 or $20 with UA Museums membership, ages 12 and up, 8 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

11 Monday
**SHARK TOOTH CREEK**
$25 or $20 with UA Museums membership, ages 10 and up, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

12 Tuesday
**TUBING LITTLE CAHABA**
$25 or $20 with UA Museums membership, ages 10 and up, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

14 Thursday
**NORTH RIVER CANOEING**
$25 or $20 with UA Museums membership, ages 10 and up, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

15 Friday
**COOSA RIVER CANOEING**
$25 or $20 with UA Museums membership, ages 12 and up, 8 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.

16 Saturday
**SHARK TOOTH CREEK**
$25 or $20 with UA Museums membership, ages 10 and up, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

18-22 Monday-Friday
**SCIENCE DAY CAMP**
$125 or $115 with UA Museums membership, 5th-8th grade, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

**september**

3 Saturday
**SATURDAY IN THE PARK**
Free with paid admission, Ask the Archaeologist – UAM’s Office of Archaeological Research, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

10 Saturday
**SATURDAY IN THE PARK**
Free with paid admission, Corn Shuck Dolls with Charlotte Hagood and Lawrence Rives, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

24 Saturday
**SATURDAY IN THE PARK**
Free with paid admission, Mat Making with Mary Smith, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

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**Location Key:**

- Moundville Archaeological Park
  (205) 371-2234
- Alabama Museum of Natural History
  (205) 348-7550
Some people visit museums because of their love for art, history, archaeology or science. For others, the attraction is the authenticity of a museum experience, seeing a beautiful work of ancient Native American art, or a meteorite that actually hit a person, an Alabama person! Some of these same characteristics of museums attracted many of us to museum work as a career.

For me, it was the allure of the museum as a truly special educational medium. The realization happened almost 30 years ago when I got a job giving tours at the campus museum as an undergraduate. I loved seeing the excitement in people’s eyes. Since that time, longitudinal studies have confirmed what I instinctively knew then. The kinds of experiences people have in museums foster long-term meaningful learning. Now I know that we call it “informal” or “free-choice” learning, and it’s actually how people learn most of what they will ever know over the course of a lifetime.

The University of Alabama Museums provides wonderful opportunities for informal learning. Whether enjoying a visit to Moundville, a tour of the Gorgas House, or a hands-on science program at the Museum of Natural History, visitors can enjoy a wide variety of museum experiences. This issue of the Museum Chronicle focuses on some of the fantastic informal learning that happens at UA Museums. People stand daily under the massive Basilosaurus cetoides skeleton in Smith Hall and are amazed to learn that whales like this swam over Alabama 35 million years ago. Visitors from around the world are stunned to learn that an ancient Native American city existed at Moundville.

As you will read here, other opportunities for fun, informal learning abound. Middle and high school students enjoy participating in a field archaeology program at the beach through our Museum Expedition program. Families and people of all ages enjoy interacting with historic figures at our annual Living History Festival. We even bring informal learning straight into Alabama living rooms through our television program Discovering Alabama. I hope you not only enjoy reading about these opportunities in the Museum Chronicle, but will choose to visit our museums, experience our exhibits and participate in our programs.

William F. Bomar, Ph.D.
When visitors tour the Jones Museum at Moundville Archaeological Park, Mississippian-era pottery is the type of artifact they will see the most. Visitors consisting of families with children, senior citizens, school groups and scout groups come to the museum with varying levels of knowledge about ancient Native Americans. As they explore the museum, a hypothetical story of ancient beliefs, rituals, relationships and events unfolds before them. Scientific research on the styles of pottery provides the information that is the basis for the exhibition storyline that is told through recreated scenes and multimedia, and the actual pottery itself. The stories that ceramics can tell are found in every zone of the museum’s renovated exhibits. In one section, pottery found at Moundville is uniquely displayed. Transparent cases form a series of square archways that visitors walk through, giving them the ability to view each piece from a number of angles, including the bases of many pots.

“As visitors explore the museum, a hypothetical story of ancient beliefs, rituals, relationships and events unfolds before them.”

A family visiting the Jones Archaeological Museum looks at a pot formed in the shape of what scholars call an ogee. In Mississippian art, ogges were thought to represent portals into other areas of the cosmos.
Clay is the earth’s most abundant mineral. It’s thus not surprising that ceramics—the art and technology of making heat hardened vessels and other articles from clay—is an invention that hallmarks different cultures worldwide. Pottery featured in the Jones Museum exhibits gives visitors a rare opportunity to observe pieces produced locally by ancient artists. For archaeologists, ceramics form a class of artifacts that can be analyzed to discover different things about a particular society. What is mixed into the clay, how a vessel is formed and the methods used to decorate pottery are all measurable characteristics that vary within a particular society over space and time. These attributes help archaeologists distinguish one society from another. The difference between prehistoric Native American and European ceramic styles, for example, can be readily observed by even the youngest Jones Museum visitor.

Prior to European contact, the native Southeastern people did not use a potter’s wheel, building their vessels instead by hand. Additionally, historic European pottery was often coated with glass-like glazes as a method of decoration, while indigenous people sometimes stained pots with mineral pigments or blackened them by smothering the oxygen out of a wood fire in which they were hardened.

Visitors can experience the broad array of ceramics on exhibit by walking through the “archway” cases at the Jones Archaeological Museum.

Generally speaking, non-clay substances mixed in with clay to keep pottery from shrinking, warping and cracking while drying and being fired are called “temper.” An advantage of using temper is that it also prevents fired pottery from breaking during thermal shock, a drastic temperature change that may be the result of using the pot over fire when cooking.

During the Mississippian Period (from around AD 1000 to 1500), a potter’s primary temper was burned and crushed mussel shell. This temper can be seen in the pottery on exhibit at the Jones Museum as small, shimmery white flecks. Most tempers Southeastern Indians used during earlier periods were inert in the clay body. However, chemical reactions occur when mixing shell temper into clay. So, Mississippian potters changed or refined their pottery building and firing techniques. Shell is made up of calcium, which acts as a flux in clay. This means it lowers the firing temperature by which pottery is permanently hardened. An overfired shell tempered pot may appear to be fine, but it will eventually exfoliate, completely crumbling as the calcined shell slowly absorbs surrounding moisture.

It is interesting to note a fair amount of pottery found at Moundville is made in foreign styles. In many instances, these ceramics were traded or given in tribute to the elites at Moundville from different chiefdoms around the Southeast. In the Jones
Museum exhibit, much of the red and white painted ceramics originated in the central Mississippi Valley. Microscopic analysis of clay and mineral particles suggests that some of the painted pottery, previously believed to have been made in modern day Arkansas, was constructed and decorated with local clays and pigments indigenous to the Black Warrior River Valley. Since Moundville artists did not paint their pottery with colored clays or pigments, researchers now theorize that at least one Mississippian artist from the middle south traveled to Moundville and created art using local materials.

This knowledge formed the seed for a story central to Moundville Archaeological Park’s renovated museum exhibits. How would this foreign artist end up at Moundville? One possible answer is the artist moved there as part of a political alliance sealed through an arranged marriage between the rulers of Moundville and another chiefdom. As a result, curators decided to recreate a Mississippian wedding procession as a major section of the Jones Archaeological Museum’s exhibits.

In any case, if the pottery was made at Moundville or elsewhere, museum visitors are able to learn about one of the most extensive displays of Mississippian ceramics found anywhere.

MOUNDVILLE PLANS AN AFTERNOON PACKED WITH BIRD FUN

As a member of the West Alabama Birding Trail, Moundville Archaeological Park will host its annual Birdfest, May 28. Visiting families can learn about bird watching, help us record birds as part of the Park’s biodiversity project through iNaturalist.org, make a gourd birdhouse and, among other things, see a raptor show. For more information call 205-371-8732 or email Kenric Minges at lkminges@ua.edu.

Coosa, a 15 year old barred owl from the Alabama Wildlife Center in Oak Mountain State Park will be featured at MAP’s Birdfest this year.

Moundville Archaeological Park has featured raptor demonstrations as part of many events at the park.
MOUNDVILLE GARDEN GROWS ANCIENT KNOWLEDGE

BY BETSY IRWIN

Sometimes first time visitors to Moundville Archaeological Park (MAP) are unprepared for the beautiful, verdant view after crossing the railroad tracks into the park. The beauty of the park during spring is especially striking. The park’s Three Sisters Native American Garden exhibit is also starting to blossom. Volunteers have already discussed the garden layout and are getting the ground ready for this year’s planting. One thing setting the park’s garden program apart from others is its staff seeks out and uses the oldest variety of seeds available. Moundville Archaeological Park has also started a seed bank utilizing these heirlooms. Currently, some seeds are mainly available to Native Americans, but as stock grows, the park hopes to make its inventory available to everyone.

In addition to heirloom varieties of corn, beans, and squash (the three sisters), the park’s garden also features numerous other plants that prehistoric Native Americans domesticated for food, medicine, dyes and other uses. The handiest plant grown by MAP gardeners is probably the gourd. Hollow on the inside, they provide a ready-made container needing only minimal work to clean, alter and decorate. Today, gourd art is a popular medium for contemporary artists, many of which are Native American.

A gourd is broadly defined as the hard-shell, durable fruit from either the Cucurbitaceae or the Bignoniaceae families. Two varieties of the calabash tree (Bignoniaceae family), the Crescentia and the Amphiteca come from Africa. It’s suspected that these types of gourds floated through the ocean currents to arrive in the Americas. The two varieties distinguished in the Cucurbit family: Cucurbita pepo, the small brightly colored ornamental gourds we see in the supermarket during autumn and Lagenaria siceraria, a
larger, brown colored, hard shell gourd like a birdhouse or a dipper gourd, are believed to have originated in Asia.

Archaeologists have evidence that *Lagenaria siceraria* gourds were likely the first plant domesticated by native people on this continent, dating to 10,000 years ago during the Paleo-Indian Period. Ancient Paleo-Indian people were nomads. Rather than settling into permanent villages, they exploited their environment by traveling seasonally to find available food sources. A gourd is a plant whose fruit dries into a lightweight, hollow, wooden-like shell, making it a valuable vessel. Bowls, bottles and dipper cups are just a few items that can be easily fashioned from gourds. Being lightweight, they are easy to transport – a crucial factor for people who pack up and move camp on a regular basis. These non-farming, Ice Age Paleo-Indian people saved and probably replanted gourd seeds in key locations, ensuring a reliable supply, demonstrating the overall importance of this simple plant.

As thousands of years went by and people started a farming lifestyle, establishing permanent villages and communal gardens, pottery was invented. Clay replaced many of the utensils formerly made from gourds because it can be fire hardened and used for cooking. As a result, gourds were utilized alongside pottery throughout the rest of the Prehistoric period. Later contact with Europeans supplanted ceramic vessels with metal pots. Unfortunately, because they decompose rather quickly, scientists rarely find gourd remains at archaeological sites. The lack of archaeological data on gourds is compounded by a lack of documentation in the historical record.

Moundville Archaeological Park’s education office uses about 200 *Lagenaria siceraria* gourds in their programs each year. As part of our Indian Summer Day Camp program, children usually make a mask and one other object from gourds. Additionally, each family visiting the Moundville Birdfest May 28 will be able decorate and take home a gourd birdhouse. In April, park patrons planted gourd seeds in miniature flower pots they decorated during Saturday in the Park Garden Day. Because the park goes through so many gourds, we have abundant gourd seeds free to anyone for the taking. If you are interested in gourd seeds or participating in any of our upcoming programs, contact the MAP Office of Education at 205-371-8732 or email Lisa Rasco at lirasco@ua.edu.
AN AFTERNOON WITH AMELIA GORGAS, HER FRIENDS AND FAMILY

BY LYDIA JOFFRAY AND ALLIE SORLIE

The Gorgas House Museum and the Alabama Museum of Natural History hosted the second annual Living History Festival on April 23. This year, our festival was partially funded by a grant from the Alabama Humanities Foundation. The event featured a special walking tour of campus, that focused on The University of Alabama’s history of slavery and involvement in the Civil War. In collaboration with Dr. Hilary Green, professor, in The University of Alabama’s Gender and Race Studies Department, this year’s event allowed participants to experience a more in-depth history of the builders of the antebellum campus. The Living History Festival was created to bring awareness of local history and the lasting contributions of historic citizens from the west central Alabama community, encourage people to make connections from past to present, and continue the conversation on issues rooted in history, such as race and gender equality, topics relevant to the present.

Appearances were made by: Eugene Allen Smith, Ann Elizabeth Hodges, Michael Tuomey, Winnie McGlamery, Autherine Lucy, Amelia and Josiah Gorgas, Sarah Gayle Crawford, and Anne Kavanaugh.

Concurrent with the festival, the Gorgas House Museum curated a special exhibit on campus history and architecture, researched and designed by Gorgas House Museum volunteers and University of Alabama students, Jessica Hauger and Matthew Ogonowski. The exhibit will be on display at the house through August. Event participants started their journey at the Gorgas House where they interacted with Amelia Gorgas and her friends and relatives before starting on the guided walking tour of campus. Sites visited on the tour were the Round House, the President’s Mansion, Nott Hall, and the slave cemetery behind the Biology Building. The tour ended at Smith Hall where visitors visited with Ann Hodges and learned about Autherine Lucy.

Amelia Gorgas was portrayed by UA Museums staff member Mary Beth Prondzinzki at the Gorgas House Museum during the Living History Festival on April 23rd.

“We are grateful to the Alabama Humanities Foundation for their support of this event. The University of Alabama Museums Executive Director, Bill Bomar, said, “The Alabama Humanities Foundation understands, perhaps better than any other Alabama institution, how public education on historic issues of national concern – whether they be about the Civil War or the Civil Rights Movement – are of utmost importance. These discussions inform the current urgent issues of our time.”
Did you always know you wanted to work in museums?

In high school I thought I wanted to be a journalist but by my freshman year at Oglethorpe University, I decided that I wanted to follow my love of history instead. My love of museums began that year with a student position at the Oglethorpe University Museum of Art. I had an incredible history professor as my advisor, Dr. Bradford Smith, who encouraged me to develop my love of history and museums as a career path.

Does the Gorgas House Museum have a ghost?

That is always a fun question to answer! While I won’t say that strange, unexplained things have not happened, I do feel that if there is a ghost, Amelia Gorgas wouldn’t let it be an unfriendly ghost. She was such a maternal and by all accounts jovial spirit, that I don’t think she would let anything harm a student or University employee!

What advice would you give a young person wanting to work as a museum director?

My best advice is to volunteer for as many different museum projects as you possibly can! The many different roles within a museum require different personality types, and you might surprise yourself with what clicks! It helps to get as much experience as possible under your belt to help bolster the resume because Museum jobs are highly competitive. If you start gaining experience early, it makes you a better candidate in the future.

What is your favorite Gorgas artifact?

My favorite artifact is an American League Baseball pass given to William Gorgas when he was Surgeon General of the US Army. The pass gave him free entry into every game in 1916 when the American League only had 8 teams, one of which was the Boston Braves (who later moved to Milwaukee and then Atlanta and now my favorite team.) Discovering that members of the Gorgas family were baseball fans, like I am, is exciting and makes me feel a connection with them.

What is the largest challenge facing you as Gorgas House Museum director?

One of the biggest challenges we face is actually physically getting people access to the House because of the parking issues and limitations that come with being located at the center of a big, bustling University. We have no dedicated parking spots, although there are several handicapped parking spaces near the home that can be utilized by our visitors. We also encourage people to park on the top of the deck at ten Hoor building because we keep tokens at the House that allow visitors to exit the deck for free. The University of Alabama Transportation Services Department is aware of our situation and will work with us to accommodate large groups and special events, which is extremely helpful.

Describe some future exhibits you would like to see at the house.

With the Centennial Anniversary of the United States involvement in World War I, we would like to commemorate the work of General William Crawford Gorgas as he served as Surgeon General of the United States Army. He worked to improve the sanitation and conditions inside camps and field hospitals so that for the first time in history fewer American soldiers died of disease than wounds sustained in battle.
FORECAST FOR SPRING 2017: A UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA BIOBLITZ
BY DR. JOHN C. ABBOTT AND MARY BETH PRONDZINSKI

Ever heard of a BioBlitz? If you love nature and making discoveries that contribute to science, this is for you! A BioBlitz is an organized block of time, usually 24 hours, where an attempt to document as many living species within a specific area ensues. A BioBlitz usually involves scientists and other experts of taxonomic groups (like plants or birds), working alongside naturalists and volunteers to conduct intensive biological surveys.

The term “BioBlitz” was first coined by Susan Rudy, a naturalist with the National Park Service, and the first one was held 20 years ago at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens in Washington D.C. At that groundbreaking event, over 1,000 species were identified, and since then, hundreds of BioBlitzes have been performed around the world.

While there have been a few BioBlitzes in Alabama, there has never been one at any UA museums or properties. We are looking towards the spring of 2017 for the first, and it will be at Moundville Archaeological Park. We want to document as many species of plants, animals, microbes, fungi, and other organisms as possible. We will have experts on hand to help with identifications and it will be your chance to not only help document the species found at the park, but learn all about them!

We will be using the citizen science website iNaturalist.org to help document the species found in the park. A Moundville Archaeological Park Biodiversity Survey project has in fact already been created: http://tinyurl.com/MAP-Biodiversity and you can now start helping us document the park’s biodiversity. Simply go to the site to see which species have already been documented there and next time you visit, add your own. There are apps available for both iPhone and Android (just search for iNaturalist). The app will not only allow you to photograph what you see, but georeference and upload it to the project. Don’t know what you are seeing? No problem, there is a large iNat community out there who will help to figure it out.

We are also creating guides to assist visitors to the park learn what they are seeing. In anticipation of the Moundville Birding Festival held on May 28th, we have put together a guide to the birds of Moundville that can be found here, http://tinyurl.com/MAP-Birds.

We have also created a project for the University of Alabama campus, http://tinyurl.com/UA-Biodiversity.
We hope that iNaturalist will provide an opportunity for visitors to Moundville and other UA properties to not only learn about their environment, but contribute to what will ultimately be a long-term dataset that can be used to inform land management decisions.

So, please start documenting species next time you visit Moundville or the UA campus and look for information on our first BioBlitz at Moundville in the spring of 2017. For those who can’t wait, National Geographic is working with the National Park Service to conduct more than a hundred concurrent BioBlitzes happening at national parks across the country, May 20-21, so check in with a National Park you are interested in visiting (http://www.nationalgeographic.com/explorers/projects/bioblitz/). On July 23rd, we will be celebrating National Moth Week, by blacklighting at Moundville Archaeological Park. This event is free and open to all ages.
Have you ever been hiking in the woods or in a park when you discover an animal or plant you have never seen before? Does that new sight or sound interest you and leave you wanting to know more? If you are a third through sixth grader in the Tuscaloosa area, you have the opportunity to attend the new Alabama Museum of Natural History’s (ALMNH) Junior Naturalist program. This five-part course connects students with nature and gives them the tools to understand their world better. The inaugural session began in March and focused on water and aquatic ecosystems you might find while hiking near a river or creek. Novice ALMNH Junior Naturalists explored Hurricane Creek in search of fish, aquatic invertebrates, insects and an understanding of the importance of a healthy creek. Parents were encouraged to join their young naturalist during the program so they could learn alongside them and connect with a new found shared knowledge. Together they turned over rocks, examined specimens with viewers, and seined for silvery fish all the while learning how these animals are a major indicator of the health of the water. Participants also learned about watersheds and how they are important to the health of the environment. The budding naturalists learned about watersheds first-hand, observing smaller slow-moving trickles from around the banks of Black Warrior River tributary, Hurricane Creek. It was an afternoon of discovery, nature, and fun.

Watersheds and aquatic animals were the focus of the first session, and the second session in May will focus on tree identification. Participants will learn all about trees and the useful skill of identification for some more common area species. Parents are encouraged to share in the program alongside their young naturalist. The group will explore The University of Alabama’s Arboretum with a hike through the beautiful property while identifying oaks, pines, magnolias and birch trees. By completion, the young naturalists and their parents will have the tools to embark on their own hikes in search of the same common tree types. Although the current sessions are completely filled, additional sessions for fall will be announced at the end of summer. The program costs $10 per participant and registration is required. Each session can be experienced separately. Call the Alabama Museum of Natural History for more information at 205-348-7550 or email Allie Sorlie at acsorlie@ua.edu.

By completion, the young naturalists and their parents will have the tools to embark on their own hikes in search of the same common tree types.
During the month of July, the Alabama Museum of Natural History offers a variety of exciting day trips and day camps to University of Alabama Museums members, their families and the general public. There is something for everyone, from kids to adults. For each program, the Museum provides all transportation and most equipment needed for the designated activity.

Our day trips provide a perfect opportunity to discover the enjoyment of visiting the hidden wonders of Alabama’s rich natural and cultural heritage. Museum staff will guide participants to some of the most interesting and scenic places that our wonderful state has to offer.

One of our most popular day trips are those to Shark Tooth Creek in Greene County, AL. Travel to the Black Belt of Alabama in search of vertebrate and invertebrate fossils from the Dinosaur Age (late Cretaceous). Participants should be prepared to get wet and muddy as we wade through shallow streams to collect sharks teeth and other fossils from streambed gravel deposits.

For those who love to be on the water, the museum offers several canoeing trips including excursions to Bear Creek, North River and Coosa River. If searching for something more leisurely, our tubing trip on the Little Cahaba River might just be a perfect way to beat the summer heat.

New this year, the museum is offering a trip to Cane Creek Canyon Nature Preserve in Tuscaloosa, AL. Participants will get to explore this beautiful area and learn all about the geology and wildlife of this region during a guided hike lead by Dr. Jim Lacefield and museum staff. The nature preserve includes a 60-foot waterfall, wetlands, sparkling streams, sunny glades, sheer canyon walls and towering cliffs overlooking seas of hardwood forests.

Finally, in addition to our day trips, the Museum also offers two week-long day camps for 3rd to 8th grade students. For 5th to 8th grade students the museum has a Science Day Camp. Participants will explore Alabama’s wonderful scientific diversity in this week-long day camp. Topics include fossils, water quality, forest ecology, wildlife of Alabama and more. This camp is perfect for middle school students interested in the natural sciences. For 3rd to 5th grade students, the museum offers an Art Camp. Participants will discover art through science and nature during this week-long half-day camp. Budding scientists and artists are invited to explore the world through a variety of art mediums including sculpture, painting, and photography.

For complete details on these programs please call 205-348-7550 or send an email to museum.programs@ua.edu. A listing of the programs can be found in the calendar section of this publication.
The above conversation is overheard daily in Smith Hall as visitors stare up at the well-known skeleton hanging from the ceiling of the Grand Gallery. What is the correct answer? The skeleton suspended from the ceiling is indeed a whale and Alabama’s State Fossil, *Basilosaurus cetoides*.

*Basilosaurus cetoides* is a primitive whale that lived in the shallow seas around the Southeastern United States during the late Eocene period, 34 million - 40 million years ago. Its smaller relative, *Basilosaurus isis*, is primarily found in the Middle East with high concentrations of fossils in Egypt.

*Basilosaurus cetoides* grew to lengths of 50-65 feet, was a top predator in the Eocene oceans and filled an ecological role similar to modern killer whales. This whale had large slicing molars and pointed canines. Fossilized stomach contents show they ate sharks, fish and even other whales. Their teeth are so unlike modern whales, that when Richard Harlan first described *Basilosaurus* in 1834 he named it ‘King Lizard’ thinking it was a reptile.

The small bones that hang from the skeleton about three quarters of the way down the back are actually the remnants of the hind legs. Whales evolved from four-legged, land dwelling mammals and are most closely related to even-toed, hoofed mammals like hippopotamuses, pigs, deer and sheep. The earliest known whale is *Himalayacetus*, which lived over 53 million years ago in what is India and Pakistan. Over time, as these early whales adapted to living in the oceans and swimming, their front limbs evolved into paddles, a tail fluke appeared for locomotion and the hind legs became smaller as they were no longer needed for walking on land.

How did *Basilosaurus cetoides* become the state fossil of Alabama? To answer that question, we need to go back to...
Farmers in Clarke, Washington and Choctaw counties would occasionally plow up the footstool-sized vertebrae of these whales and use them as andirons, fence supports and one account references a vertebra used as a pillow!

In the early 1800s. Farmers in Clarke, Washington and Choctaw counties would occasionally plow up the footstool-sized vertebrae of these whales and use them as andirons, fence supports and one account references a vertebra used as a pillow! In the 1820s and 1830s, vertebrae and other fragments from Louisiana and Alabama made their way to The Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia for study. As mentioned above, Richard Harlan named the fossil the ‘King Lizard’ in 1834 based on his comparisons with other fossil reptiles known at the time. His identification ignited a debate over the true identity of the animal that was not settled until the famous British anatomist, Sir Richard Owen, viewed and studied the specimens and showed that Basilosaurus was a mammal most like a modern whale.

But the controversy over Basilosaurus was just beginning. In early 1845 a showman named Albert Koch, not unlike P.T. Barnum, heard of the ‘saurian’ fossils coming out of Alabama and headed down to procure a specimen for exhibit. By July, 1845 Koch had a 114-foot sea monster he named ‘Hydrargos’ on display for those willing to pay. The specimen toured the Northeast and eventually made its way to Europe where King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia purchased it for the Royal Anatomical Museum. It quickly became apparent to trained paleontologists that the specimen was a fraud. Koch had put together a composite of multiple Basilosaurus specimens and used invertebrates and rocks to fashion the missing bones. Always the showman, Koch took his earnings and returned to Alabama to procure more fossils and began touring a smaller, 96-foot specimen in 1849.

Thus, Basilosaurus cetoides became one of the earliest named fossils from the United States and one of the most controversial fossils discovered. Due to the commonality of fossils that are found in Alabama, researchers from all over the world have come to our state to collect and study this amazing whale.

In 1892, the Smithsonian Institution sent a field crew to Alabama and collected a partial specimen that is now housed in Washington D.C. at the National Museum of Natural History. In the 1960s Dr. Douglas Jones collected a partial skeleton in Washington County, which is now at the Alabama Museum of Natural History. The most recent near complete skeleton was collected by the Red Mountain Museum in 1982 by Gordon Bell. Due to his efforts, the state legislature declared Basilosaurus cetoides the state fossil by Act No. 84-66 in 1984. Under this act, no fossils of Basilosaurus may be removed from the state of Alabama without the written approval of the governor.

So, next time you hear any debate over the identity of the skeleton hanging in the Grand Gallery of Smith Hall, share the history of Basilosaurus cetoides, Alabama’s State Fossil.
What if there was a place where you could visit innovative people who explore ways to make our environment better?

What if you could travel to a place and learn things that would make life better for your family?

Each year Discovering Alabama Model School students at Woodland Forrest Elementary kick off Earth Week by traveling outside their classrooms to their own school grounds. They call it DiscoverFest. You may ask yourself, “What is this event and how did it get started?”

According to Diana Marchant, Science Resource Teacher at Woodland Forrest Elementary, students from Paul Bryant High School’s “Earth Nerds Club” hosted an event to showcase their Earth Day Projects. Youngsters from Woodland Forrest were invited to work with the high school students. As the high school club dissolved, Woodland Forrest Elementary was developing into the Discovering Alabama Model School. DiscoverFest was created to celebrate their new Discovering Alabama Model School program along with Earth Week. DiscoverFest has evolved into an annual community event where experts share environmental innovations and demonstrate how young leaders are needed in future jobs.

DiscoverFest 2016, held April 15, included representatives from Alabama Wildlife Federation; Alabama Mathematics, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI); Thompson Tractor; All Fired Up; Ricky the Recycler with Tuscaloosa Environmental Services; Tuscaloosa Barnyard; Honey Bee Keepers; The University of Alabama Museum of Natural History; Tie-Dying; Druid City Garden Project; Mercedes Benz Environmental Engineers and Wal-Mart Market.

Teachers, parents and students love DiscoverFest! Here’s what they are saying...

“The kids really enjoy DiscoverFest! It gives them the opportunity to see different ways to reduce, reuse and recycle. In the past I have had students bring in things that they have “up-cycled” at home after participating in DiscoverFest. That is always fun to see!” Mona Cartee – Teacher

“DiscoverFest is one of the most inclusive activities held at Woodland Forrest. ALL students are provided many opportunities that encourage environmentally-friendly attitudes. They gain more than just an awareness of recycling, they learn the importance of decreasing the amount of waste that they produce. They actively participate in demonstrations and activities that may include anything from eco-friendly cars to the importance of bees in their gardens.” Carrie Lucas – Teacher

“DiscoverFest is a great day of fun and learning. It gives the children a chance to interact with others in different areas of science and the environment. It’s a great day for ‘hands-on’ learning.” Sabrina – Parent

“I like DiscoverFest because I get to learn about the earth, recycling and animals.” Gerald – Student

“I like DiscoverFest because I get to stop pollution and stop people from littering.” Travis – Student

For more information on DISCOVERFEST or the Discovering Alabama Model School Program at Woodland Forrest Elementary, contact Pam Sloan, Project Coordinator, Discovering Alabama Model School at 205-348-9077 or email her at ptsloan@ua.edu.
STUDENT PROFILE: LASHUNDA SIMPSON

BY MARY BETH PRONDZINSKI

LaShunda Simpson, University of Alabama work-study student, has been assisting in UA Museums’ Natural History Collections for nearly two years. Sadly, she graduates this spring and will be sorely missed: not only for her ability to stick with and stay focused on what others might consider “the mundane,” but for her sense of humor and inquisitive nature that make her a pleasure to work with.

LaShunda is a Birmingham native and Political Science major with an unusual interest in the Museums which led her to apply for a clerical position. Originally, she was hired to scan and data enter the archival archaeology photos in file cabinets hidden away in collections storage at Mary Harmon Bryant Hall, but she soon became an asset in other projects requiring initiative with minimal supervision. She was instrumental in weeding out and organizing the research library, and assisting on databasing the recently donated literary acquisitions. When asked how she felt working in a field so unlike her chosen major, she replied, “I like the routineness and the fact that I can work alone, and I like museum people. I never felt like an ‘underling’ in this position. Besides, where else would I be able to say I got to help transport a stuffed lion!”

What are LaShunda’s plans post-graduation? “I hope to become a campaign speech writer. I believe there are already too many lawyers.” We bid farewell to an exemplary student of The University of Alabama Museums’ legacy.

LaShunda Simpson at work in the Museum Research Library.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM EDUCATES, LEADS UA STUDENT GROUP IN LAKE CLEAN UP

BY TODD HESTER

The seventh annual Lake Tuscaloosa-North River Waterfest and Lake Clean Up, a two-day educational and cleanup event, was April 8 and 9 at Lake Tuscaloosa.

This year, in addition to teaching an educational module and having a table at the festival, the Alabama Museum of Natural History took a group of University of Alabama students to Lake Nicol to do a mini cleanup in addition to the one at Lake Tuscaloosa. The students helped remove six large bags of trash from around the lake.

Top right: UA students participate in a lake clean-up on Lake Nicol in association with the Lake Tuscaloosa clean-up.

Bottom right: Museum Naturalist Todd Hester educates Northington Elementary 4th graders about aquatic macro invertebrates at the 2016 Lake Tuscaloosa/North River Watershed Festival.

The festival included an education and informational expo at the Phelps Activity Center for area fourth-grade students. The lake cleanup event was open to the public on Saturday, April 9 at the Highway 43 boat landing and Rock Quarry boat landing.

Residents of the City of Tuscaloosa and surrounding areas receive their drinking water from Lake Tuscaloosa, which is fed by the North River watershed. Waterfest provides an opportunity for local students and citizens to learn more about protecting and conserving the local water supply.

Top right: UA students participate in a lake clean-up on Lake Nicol in association with the Lake Tuscaloosa clean-up.

Bottom right: Museum Naturalist Todd Hester educates Northington Elementary 4th graders about aquatic macro invertebrates at the 2016 Lake Tuscaloosa/North River Watershed Festival.
Throughout the 13th century, as the city of Moundville grew in population and regional importance, more than two dozen large earthen mounds were constructed to house its rulers. Each mound was modified and grew larger and taller over time, perhaps as new leaders came to power. This constant rebuilding and exposure to the elements also required regular maintenance and repair to keep the mounds stable and presentable to local residents and visitors.

One might be surprised to learn that this practice of constant maintenance and repair continues today at Moundville. Since the site became a park in the 1930s, archaeologists and maintenance crews have battled the elements and vegetation growth to preserve the mounds. And while the city’s rulers have long since departed, thousands of local, national and international travelers still visit Moundville Archaeological Park annually to learn about Mississippian culture and this monumental city.

Mound B, the “Chieftain’s Mound,” is the largest and tallest construction at Moundville. As such, it has always drawn visitors to its summit for the impressive vista it provides. From this vantage point one can also, perhaps, sense the power the city’s rulers must have felt. Although access to the top of Mound B was originally a ramped surface, in 1967 wooden steps were set into the ramp to allow safer access to the top. These steps remained in place for more than 45 years. In recent years, however, the steps had begun to show their age. When discussions about renovating the stairs began, UA Museums staff members realized that supporter, Jim Caldwell, had, in fact, supervised the original construction of the steps at Mound B.

“The Chieftain’s Mound has always drawn visitors to its summit for the impressive vista it provides. From this vantage point one can also, perhaps, sense the power the city’s rulers must have felt.”
In the spring of 2016, a talented crew from the University of Alabama’s Student Engineers in Action (SEA) spent their spring semester removing the original stairs and constructing a new and more durable set of steps. Led by SEA President Alex Chase and Project Manager Elizabeth Douglas, more than 50 undergraduate students have spent their Saturdays leveling the dirt surface on the old stairway, lifting nearly 120 railroad cross ties into place and hammering rebar into holes drilled into the ties. An arduous task indeed! The completed stairs will allow future visitors easy access to the summit of Mound B for another 50 years or more.

This project would not have been possible without the collaboration of SEA, staff from Moundville Archaeological Park and the Office of Archaeological Research, and The University of Alabama’s Facilities Department. The Mound B step project was proposed as one of SEA’s annual service projects and its success demonstrates the value in promoting hands-on learning experiences for UA undergraduate students. While Moundville will forever be grateful for the new stairs and many volunteer hours provided to the park, each student will always remember the lasting contribution they made to further the interpretation and promotion of one of the most important archaeological sites in the United States.
The Whooping Crane (Grus americana), at five feet tall, is the tallest bird in North America. This mostly white bird also has one of the longest wing spans, reaching almost eight feet from black wing tip to black wing tip. Yet the birds’ average weight is only about 15 pounds, facilitating annual migration from remote wilderness nesting grounds in Canada to distant southern reaches, including parts of Florida and, along the way, Alabama.

“Whoopers” are among the oldest living bird species on Earth. Historically they ranged widely relying on diverse wetland ecosystems for overwintering, breeding and migration stopovers. In the mid 1800s their population was estimated to be as many as 1500 birds. However, this shy and secretive species soon suffered extensive loss of its needed wild areas as European settlers spread westward draining marshes, plowing prairies and encroaching on wildland habitats. Unregulated hunting also took serious toll. By the 1940s the Whooping Crane numbers were down to less than 20 birds. Its population vanishing, and its nesting and migrating rituals disrupted, the species was on the verge of extinction.

Today the Whooping Crane remains vulnerable to the ever continuing loss of wildland habitats, but thanks to the dedicated efforts of wildlife scientists and conservationists, the population has steadily recovered to around 600 birds. Among the efforts for recovery are the captive incubation and raising of young chicks, together with “Operation Migration” which uses ultralight aircraft to reintroduce young birds to migration. A primary migratory route follows over Alabama, where lucky birders can sometimes enjoy a sighting of this beautiful rare creature.

As with the Bald Eagle, the Eastern Indigo snake, and other species that have faced impending extinction, it seems that Alabama offers exceptionally suitable wild areas to support species recovery. And, as with other threatened species, the Whooping Crane has been selected by Discovering Alabama as the subject for an episode of our Emmy-winning series. Last year the International Crane Foundation, recognizing the significance of Alabama for Whooping Crane recovery, invited Discovering Alabama to pursue production of this episode. Of course, as with other episodes of Discovering Alabama, the first requisite is to find production funds, which in this case are projected to be roughly $100,000. Given that the Whooping Crane is of national and even global interest, we are hoping that our production plans will soon attract the needed support. Anyone wishing to contribute toward this vital need is heartily invited to do so.

During Discovering Alabama’s 30 plus years of documentary production, the series has been instrumental in establishing many educational and environmental initiatives for wildlife conservation, not the least of which is the Alabama Forever Wild Program. Our anticipated episode about the majestic Whooping Crane will be another important contribution to saving one of the world’s most remarkable species.

Highlights of the show include:

- The variety of Alabama's outdoor trails
- The history of early trails in the state
- The benefits of outdoor trails today and related implications for the future
- Guest interviews with Alabamians involved in the development and promotion of trail systems in the state
- Non-traditional trail offerings such as Alabama's birding trails, golf trail, and covered bridge trail

For more information about Discovering Alabama or to order this DVD or other DVDs of our programs, go to www.discoveringalabama.org or call 205-348-2039.
In our world, the destruction of archaeological sites is inevitable. That statement may come as a shock to some people, but that fact is undeniable when we examine what it really means. Archaeological sites are the remnants of past activities left behind by those who came before. They are typically left unprotected, often partially buried, and subject to natural degradation and human impacts. Their destruction may take the blink of an eye or it may take thousands of years. The timing depends on if it results from bioturbation by plants and animals, weathering by wind and rain, being bulldozed by progress, or carried off by untrained hands. Regardless, the result is the same — destruction and loss of something that could have told us so much about our past.

As stewards of our own heritage, what do we do about this inevitable loss? The answer: work to change what we can to minimize the effects of site destruction. While changing the way critters churn the ground or the way rains break down stone is not likely to happen, the effects of untrained hands is something we can alter.

Education is the key to introducing people to ideas that may not come naturally. The importance of leaving an arrowhead where it is, for instance, may not be something that most people consider important. Instead, the desire to remove it from its context, create a collection, or even to try and sell it is the more common scenario. For centuries this has been the bane of archaeologists, preservationists, and living peoples with ancestral ties to the places and items left behind. Rarely do people understand that without appropriate documentation, more information is lost than is gathered by simply picking it up and taking it home. Even when an archaeological site is excavated by the most careful archaeologists, the site is being destroyed, albeit in a very controlled way. The reason we excavate sites so carefully is to be able to recreate them from the data we recover and maintain an understanding of a site’s or an artifact’s context. What was found with what and where is as important as the artifact itself. That type of information is vital to understanding an archaeological site.

To meet this need for educating people, The University of Alabama Museums, Office of Archaeological Research (OAR) has partnered with AmeriCorps’ Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program to build a Heritage Preservation Program. The Program is a multi-year effort that will partner with agencies and corporations charged with protecting cultural resources to bring the message of site protection to public elementary schools in the region.

Karl Bennett, OAR’s VISTA member and University of Alabama alumnus, is working to create curricula to teach elementary age children about looting and the negative impacts it has on archaeological sites. After graduating with a BA in anthropology in 2014, Bennett worked on archaeological projects throughout the Southeastern United States and abroad in both the academic and private sectors. Having gained experience working in archaeology, he then set his sights towards education.

The program is in its first year out of a projected five years and is currently in the curricula development phase. The next stage of the program is to present educational materials to 3rd and 4th grade classrooms in Hale, Bibb and Jefferson Counties. “We are focusing on only three counties in Alabama right now, but the ultimate goal is to impact students throughout the state,” says Bennett.

“You can think of this as a ‘no-smoking’ campaign against site destruction,” says Matt Gage, Director of OAR. “We want people to realize how rapidly these things are being destroyed and to know that there’s a right way and a wrong way to go about saving what we can. If we can get kids excited about archaeology and the past, and teach them the proper respect for handling it, they’ll pass that excitement on to their parents and friends.”

“The goal of the project is to instill an ethical imperative in kids to become stewards of the non-renewable cultural resources unique to Alabama,” Bennett explains, “because people who understand the past, respect the past.”
The Museum Expedition, sponsored by the Alabama Museum of Natural History, offers a unique summer field experience for middle and high school students, as well as the general public. In an effort to provide hands-on scientific field research in the areas of paleontology, archaeology and practical ecology, the Museum Expedition was designed to offer the participant an opportunity to work side-by-side with professional researchers on an actual field project.

Founded in 1979, the Expedition has gone to many different sites in Alabama and Mississippi, from the fossil rich Black Belt Region to the bluff shelters of the Tennessee River Valley, from historic archaeology at the ghost town of Old Cahawba to Native American mounds near the mighty Mississippi River. The Museum Expedition combines real exploration with real science to create a unique experience and lasting friendships.

Operating from a large tent camp in remote settings, the Expedition offers participants a chance to experience scientific research in much the same way it would have been carried out 60 years ago. With a generator for electricity at night and a water tank to provide the only running water in camp, the participants learn to experience a way of life from a much simpler era.

This year the 38th Annual Museum Expedition will be conducting field work in archaeology within Gulf State Park, Baldwin County. Participants will have the fun and unique opportunity to work with scientists in the field as part of an actual scientific research project exploring the cultural history of Alabama. Expedition participants will spend a week at the Expedition field camp working with scientists seeking evidence of the early inhabitants of the Gulf Coast and learning excavation techniques, laboratory procedures, and artifact identification. Working side-by-side with archaeologists, they will gain a glimpse of what life was like in prehistoric Alabama. Participants will conduct scientific excavations at the Middle Woodland and Mississippian shell midden along the banks of Shelby Lake in Gulf State Park. This midden, an area of trash and food refuse, will provide invaluable information into the prehistoric lifeways of the Gulf’s original inhabitants dating more than 500 to 2500 years ago. Data relating to food choices, procurement, tool usage, trade networks, and ceramic technology are just a few of the many types of information that can be gleaned from these excavations. Artifacts typically found in shell middens include ceramics, stone tools, animal bones as a byproduct of food and tool usage and plant remains among many others.

Expedition participants will learn why archaeological excavations are conducted, the methods used in archaeological site excavation, and the lab procedures utilized to identify artifacts under the tutelage of University of Alabama archaeologists. Furthermore, as a part of this year’s Expedition, participants will have hands-on knowledge of cutting edge scientific technology in the field of archaeology. Remote sensing utilizing ground penetrating radar will provide an image of what was buried in the ground more than two millennia ago and help direct future excavations.
Brandon Thompson, RPA, an archaeologist with The University of Alabama Museums Office of Archaeological Research (OAR), will be directing this year’s excavations. Brandon has been working with OAR for more than seven years and has worked with and helped direct several past Expeditions, including: the 27th Expedition at Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park in 2007, the 32nd Expedition at Brierfield Ironworks Historic State Park in 2010, and the 36th Expedition at an antebellum plantation home in Marion County, Alabama in 2014. Brandon’s research background includes bioarchaeology, forensic anthropology and southeastern archaeology, and he is looking forward to Expedition once again.

“Participants will have the fun and unique opportunity to work with scientists in the field as part of an actual scientific research project to explore the cultural history of Alabama.”

Archaeologist Brandon Thompson (far right) works with student participants to lay out an excavation unit.
Heather Buchanan, from Knoxville, TN is on the verge of her final days as a student majoring in history at The University of Alabama. Since May 2015, she has been a volunteer at the Gorgas House Museum where she gives tours and helps with exhibits and events. When asked why she wanted to volunteer at the Gorgas House, Heather said, “I was looking for an extracurricular activity related to my major and saw the Gorgas House had volunteer opportunities available. I met the director, Lydia, and instantly knew I wanted to be involved with the museum because of the fun, inviting atmosphere she has created there.”

Heather enjoys giving tours of the house to students, faculty, alumni and people just passing through town looking for something to do. She likes telling visitors about the Gorgas family and their role in campus history to people who otherwise might not know it. One of the most interesting aspects about the Gorgas family that Heather enjoys relating to the public is about Amelia Gorgas’ son William. She stated, “I think William Crawford Gorgas’ instrumental role in eradicating yellow fever and malaria in the Panama Canal Zone is interesting and not many people know how important he was to that effort.”

Heather is also appreciative of the historic nature of the house and its durability. “I think it’s amazing that the house was built in 1829 and is still standing in pretty good condition today,” she stated.

After graduation, Heather is moving back to Knoxville for the summer before attending Law School at the University of Colorado this fall.

Heather Buchanan is pictured on the far right when she and other students volunteered for the Haunting at the Museum.

**SCIENCE SUNDAY: ALABAMA WATERWAYS**

The Department of Biology shows event participants a selection of freshwater mussels that can be found in Alabama rivers.

Event participants play watershed bingo and learn all about life in Alabama’s rivers and streams.
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA MUSEUMS MEMBERSHIP
GIVING LEVELS & BENEFITS

Much of the natural beauty of Alabama is found among its many rivers. To recognize the vital role these rivers play in making our state unique, The University of Alabama Museums has designated gift membership levels with the names of some of Alabama’s best-known and beloved rivers. All membership levels are important to the Museum. We hope you will be as generous as your circumstances allow.

Note: Each membership level receives the benefits listed plus all benefits of levels that precede it.

Alabama River ($40–$99)
- Unlimited admission (except for special events) to Moundville Archaeological Park, Alabama Museum of Natural History, Gorgas House and Paul W. Bryant Museum
- Membership newsletter
- Discounts on Museum programs and Summer Expedition
- Membership card and decal
- Recognition in newsletter
- Invitations to special member events

Black Warrior River ($100–$249)
- Discovering Alabama DVDs
- 10% discount at University of Alabama Museum Shops

Cahaba River ($250–$499)
- Free admission to Moundville Native American Festival
- Unlimited admission to Museums for five guests
- A one-year gift membership at Alabama River level
- Additional 10% (20% total) discount at University of Alabama Museum Shops

Coosa River ($500–$999)
- Unlimited admission to Museums for two additional guests (seven total)
- Reduced rental rates for Museum facilities

Sipsey River ($1,000–$2,499)
- Unlimited admission to Museums for three additional guests (10 total)
- Two additional one-year gift memberships (three total), all at Black Warrior level

Douglas E. Jones Society ($2,500–$4,999)
- Unlimited admission to Museums for two additional guests (12 total)
- Special recognition in Smith Hall Foyer
- Three one-year gift memberships upgraded to Cahaba River level

Eugene Allen Smith Society ($5,000+)
- Book on natural history from The University of Alabama Press
- Unlimited admission to Museums for three additional guests (15 total)

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