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Historians gather at archaeological site

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Homer Daehn works on an effigy mound carving project during Man Mound Day on Saturday east of Barab
Rhonda Siebecker, News Republic

Man Mound Day is all about stepping back in time.

Attendees at Saturday's event were treated to demonstrations in woodcarving, spear throwing and were treated to an appearance by regional surveyor William Canfield ... well, someone who looked like him, anyway. Canfield is credited with surveying Man Mound for the first time in 1859.

In 1908, the Sauk County Historical Society and several other groups succeeded in establishing Man Mound Park to help preserve the ancient effigy mound that resembles the shape of a human.

Volunteer Rob Nurre, one of the main coordinators of the event, dresses as Canfield each year Man Mound Day is held. He gives a demonstration in the voice of Canfield, speculating about the creation of Man Mound more than 1,000 years ago.

Nurre said effigy mounds are unique, since one or two burials are usually included in the mound, as opposed to conical-shaped mounds that often contain multiple burials. "The effigies are special," Nurre said. "Is this where a leader is buried? Perhaps. There is so much we don't know. That's what makes them fascinating."

One fascinated participant was one-year-old Tennessee Shelton, who was at Man Mound Day with his parents, Laura O' Leary and Cully Shelton. "We had an interest in wanting to learn more about the local history," Shelton said. He said they have lived in the area for about five years.

Several groups such as the Center for Wisconsin Archaeology, the Wisconsin Archaeologists office and the Sauk County Historical Society had booths with displays at the event.

One participant worked to create a special effigy project. Wood carver Homer Daehn trimmed away at a large cherry log, carving out six fox-shaped mounds in the top of it. He said it was a challenge to keep to the original effigy mound shape.

"They're mounds," he said. "It's more of a cookie cutter look." Daehn also displayed a 36-inch tall carving of Man Mound he created.

The Center for Wisconsin Archaeology booth featured artifacts such as a raddatz projectile point estimated to be 5,000 years old and named after an area at Natural Bridge State Park, about 25 miles away from Man Mound.

UW-Baraboo/Sauk County Center for Wisconsin Archeology alumna Harley

Soerfass said she participated archaeological digs in the Man Mound area.

“We stayed clear of the mound itself, but we tested to see if the legs were disturbed and they were highly disturbed,” she said.

The legs of Man Mound are separated from the rest of the body by Man Mound Road. Soerfass said cattle likely had dug up what was left of the legs. She said the students were able to dig behind the schoolhouse at Man Mound Park, uncovering slate and an old brass button.

Soerfass also demonstrated spear throwing using an atlatls, which was used about 12,000 years ago by paleo-Indian people.

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