

Dig returns to artifact-rich Colonial American site in NY

July 31 2015, by Chris Carola

An archaeological project has returned to an artifact-rich state park in the southern Adirondacks on what was the focal point of the warring British and French empires more than 250 years ago.

A team of students and volunteers is trying to determine if a low stone wall along the edge of Lake George Battlefield Park and another structure being unearthed nearby were built during the French and Indian War from 1754 to 1763, when thousands of British and Colonial American troops were posted here while fighting raged along the northern frontier separating Britain's New York province and French-held Canada.

Located in woods at the edge of the 35-acre park overlooking Lake George's southern end, the overgrown line of piled stones is easy to miss. Visitors strolling along the park's access road and bicyclists zipping past on the neighboring bike path don't know it's there.

"Most people would walk over that and not notice," said Doug Schmidt, a retired state forester serving as a crew chief for the six-week archaeological field school sponsored by the nearby State University of New York at Adirondack.

Schmidt is among nearly four dozen people spending a second consecutive summer excavating sections of the park in search of evidence from this popular tourist town's bloody past. The park is on land where Colonial American troops fought the French and Indians in

1755, as well as the site of a large British encampment that was besieged two years later along with nearby Fort William Henry.

Last summer, a dig conducted in the park for the first time in 13 years yielded thousands of artifacts dating back to that period, including uniform buttons, musket balls and piles of animal bones from the livestock slaughtered to feed the troops.

Led by David Starbuck, a college anthropology professor who has dug at the region's 18th century military sites for more than 20 years, the battlefield project seeks to identify the footprint of a sprawling encampment known to have occupied high ground just east of Fort William Henry, built in 1755.

It was from this "entrenched camp" that British and Colonial troops started their retreat after the fort surrendered to end a weeklong siege in August 1757. France's American Indian allies set upon the column, killing scores in a massacre that later provided the backdrop for James Fenimore Cooper's novel, "The Last of the Mohicans."

While excavating the stone wall, Starbuck's team uncovered mortar believed to have been made in kilns built into nearby knolls. A few artifacts have been found near the wall, but so far nothing has been found that would help estimate its construction date, Starbuck said.

Nearby, Schmidt is supervising the project's most experienced diggers as they uncover a stone wall built in the middle of the remains of what was supposed to be a large British fortification named after King George II of England.

Only one corner of the fortification was completed in 1759, when work was halted with the end of the fighting after the fall of Quebec. The bastion was used again during the Revolutionary War, but was

abandoned afterward. It served as an early tourist attraction as Lake George was settled in the 1800s.

In the 1910s and the 1930s, local history buffs tried to reconstruct the Fort George bastion. Today, the structure constitutes a U-shaped mound with 20-foot-high grass-covered sides. At some point years ago, the open end was filled in with soil. When the overgrowth inside was cut down for the dig, the archaeologists found the top of a [stone wall](#) jutting from the dirt.

So far, the top 3 to 4 feet of what's believed to be a barracks wall has been uncovered, Starbuck said. It's unclear yet if the wall is from the reconstruction efforts from 80-plus years ago, but Starbuck said the condition of the mortar indicates the structure could date to the late 1750s.

"It's a much more intact structure than we ever anticipated," he said.

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