

WPCC's Clark surveying Burke Indian sites



Clark with artifacts and county map

By WM. ROBERTSON JR.
News Herald Staff Writer

Professor Larry Clark of Western Piedmont Community College is making an archaeological field study of the history of Indians in Burke County, a history which he says may go back as far as 15,000 years B. C.

Clark, chairman of the WPCC Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, will spend the summer on the project while on educational leave. He will examine areas where Indians may have lived in hopes of locating as many sites as possible.

Clark will not dig but will limit his effort to surface examination of the areas. Sites which seem promising could be subjects of excavation at a later time.

Clark will report his findings to the Anthropology Research Laboratory in Chapel Hill, the Department of Cultural Resources in Raleigh and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. He is using these sources for his initial information in seeking Indian locations.

Clark also hopes to find new sites through information gained from people in the county. Such information could come from a traditional story of Indian activity in an area or from discovered relics. Clark

seeks information from owners of relic collections concerning the source of the relics. His search has uncovered at least two previously unknown areas of Indian activity.

"We know they were here and we know they were here in numbers," Clark says of the Indians in Burke County. Tribes which lived in or passed through the county included Cherokee, Catawba, Cheraw and Tutelo. Clark says most of the Indians were killed by disease and war when permanent white settlers came to the county around 1750. Cherokee raids were recorded in the county as late as 1776.

The oldest Indians in Burke County were probably a tribe of "big game hunters" which may have lived here as long ago as 15,000 B. C. They are thought to have hunted the deer, elk, and bison which were then in the area.

Clark explains that speculation concerning the history of Indians in the area is based on examination of tools and other items found where they lived. Different types of weapon points, tools and pottery can be associated fairly accurately with certain tribes and time periods.

Much of the knowledge in this area is based on studies by Dr. J. L. Coe of the
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WPCC's Clark

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has excavated Indian relics from a number of sites and used carbon dating and other techniques to determine their age.

The artifacts from a given time period have certain characteristics which usually do not appear in other pieces, such as the shape of an arrowhead or the mixture of clay in a piece of pottery. Thus when an arrowhead or piece of pottery of a certain type is found, it reveals certain information as to when Indians were in an area.

Bits of pottery, weapon points and stone tools are the most commonly found ar-

tifacts. Among pottery pieces found are some of a type which is made with soapstone in the clay. This mixture is unique to Burke County.

Clark hopes to stimulate enough interest in Raleigh and Chapel Hill in Burke County's Indian history to bring scientists here to do excavations of the more promising sites. Only small efforts years ago have been made at scientific digging in this area.

Clark notes that further professional study of the history of native Americans in the county is also important because many valuable artifacts are being taken by what he calls "pot hunters" and "headhunters." Pothunters are amateurs seeking Indian

pottery and headhunters are those seeking Indian graves on the mistaken belief that the Indians buried dead person's valuables with the body.

Clark is also advocating the creation of a permanent facility for display of collections of Indian artifacts in the county. Valuable collections have been lost or sent out of the county for lack of such a facility, Clark says. He has recommended to the Burke Courthouse Committee that a section of the old courthouse building be used for this purpose.

Clark has asked that anyone in the county who has Indian artifacts or information concerning Indian sites contact him at the school, phone 437-8688.