

### **WVAPSS Annual meeting and tour, June 9-10, 2017**

The Annual Meeting and tour of the West Virginia Association of Professional Soil Scientists was held in Moundsville, WV at the Grave Creek Mound Archaeological Complex on June 9, 2017. The theme of the agenda was archaeology with a keynote presentation by Matt Purtill, Archaeologist at Ball State University and PhD candidate at WVU. Matt's focus is the use of soils and geologic information in archaeological investigations. His PhD project site in Sandy Springs, Ohio occupies a fairly small Aeolian deposit (primarily sand, with some loessal soils mapped in positions above the sands) along the north shore of the Ohio River which has yielded a massive number of artifacts, many orders of magnitude beyond other sites used by Paleo-Indians. Optically-Stimulated Luminescence indicates human occupation of the site to be ~12-13,500 years B.P., far older than the accepted timeframe in this part of North America. As active dunes, occupations have been cyclically buried and reoccupied over time, indicating this site was a favored site used by many generations over the years.

Andrea Keller of the WV Division of Culture and History provided information on the Grave Creek Mound (Figures 1 & 2.), built by relative newcomers, about 1,000 years ago. Darla Spencer, Lecturer-Native American Studies at WVU, provided an overview of the Fort Ancient people in West Virginia. The Fort Ancient people represent the first inhabitants to utilize agriculture and adopt a non-nomadic lifestyle. Several sites have been identified and investigated, notably a village near Buffalo, WV along the Kanawha River.



Figure 1. Grave Creek Mound, Moundsville, WV

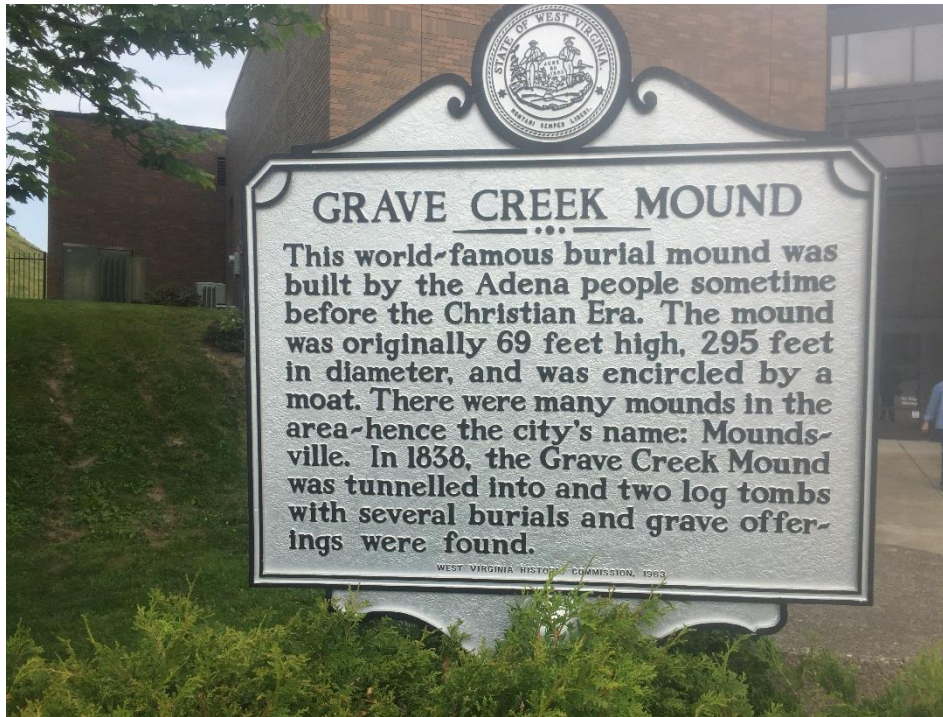


Figure 2. Grave Creek marker

Mary Beth Adams provided an overview of the role of fire in forest ecology in the region. The use of fire by the first inhabitants of North America has been established and the practice of periodic burning has been performed for many generations until recently. Smoky the Bear brought a lull to the practice of burning woodlands that persisted for many decades and is still in full force in West Virginia. While states like Kentucky practice prescribed burns, which enhance oak-hickory species composition, West Virginia's anti-fire practices are leading to a shade-tolerant, fire intolerant forest species composition.

A tour of the Meadowcroft Rockshelter, the oldest known human habitation in North America, took place on Saturday. The Rockshelter (Figure 3 & 4) site was a known party site during recent years as evidenced by beer cans, bottles and fire pits. The former landowner was investigating the tailings of a ground hog burrow in the shelter and noticed a number of Indian artifacts. Being an astute judge of human nature, he told no-one and went on a quest to find an Archaeologist interested in examining the site. As one might expect, all of the hot shot notables ignored him. University of Pittsburgh PhD student Jim Adovasio, however, followed his nose and proceeded to investigate. The results of his investigation in the mid-1970s rocked the world of Archaeology, placing human habitation in North America at a date much earlier than previously determined. The sandstone of the rockshelter is weakly cemented and deposition has buried occupations spanning 16,000 years. It was pointed out that the climate, flora and fauna 16,000 years ago, was not much different than today, even though the glacial moraine sat a mere 50-60 miles away. In addition, the diet, as evidenced by remains around the fire pits, consisted of small game and fish.



Figure 3. Meadowcroft Rockshelter investigation site

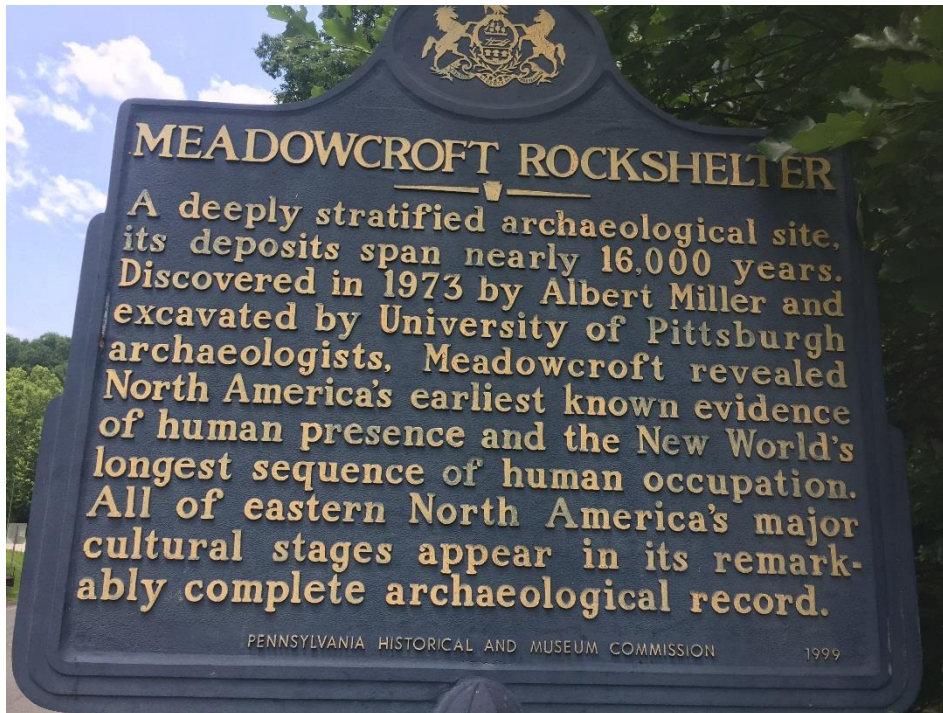


Figure 4. Meadowcroft Rockshelter historical marker

Photos at-large



WVAPSS attendees enjoying locally crafted beverages at Wheeling Brewing Company in anticipation of the evening meal. (Counter clockwise, from lower left, Mary Ellen Cook, Jason Teets, Rob Pate, Susan Demas, Mary Beth Adams, Chris Seitz, Skip Bell, Fred Padden)



Jason Teets motioning for Skip Bell to quit talking so much



Former West Virginia State Penitentiary. Archaeologists claiming human occupation in North America prior to 8,000 B.P., along with soil scientists recognizing Spodosols in WV, were sent here for reeducation and hard labor.