

Tulane archaeologist co-authors first details on remains of 450-year-old Spanish fort

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Tulane anthropology professor Chris Rodning has co-authored a paper that appears in the October 2018 issue of the journal *American Antiquity*. (photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

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Chris Rodning, the Paul and Debra Gibbons Professor in the Tulane University School of Liberal Arts' [Department of Anthropology](#), has co-authored a major paper on the archaeology of a Spanish colonial fort built in 1566 at the Berry site, a large Native American town in present-day North Carolina.

The paper, which appears in the October 2018 issue of the journal *American Antiquity* is the first formal scholarly publication detailing the archaeological remnants of the fort itself, which was attacked and abandoned in 1568.

Rodning has collaborated on research at the Berry site, in western North Carolina, with David Moore, an anthropology professor from [Warren Wilson College](#), and Rob Beck, an associate professor of anthropology from the [University of Michigan](#). The trio has worked together with students and collaborators since 2001 in excavating the site and analyzing their finds.

"Recent archaeological finds at the Berry site demonstrate the scale of effort that mid-16th-century Spanish colonists invested in establishing permanent settlements in the northern borderlands of *La Florida*, the Spanish colonial province in the American South," Rodning said.

"Archaeological remnants of the fort and the adjacent colonial town resemble those at other Spanish colonial settlements, including Santa Elena, the capital town of the Spanish colonial province of *La Florida*, in what is now coastal South Carolina. Santa Elena was the point of origin for the expeditions led by Spanish explorer Juan Pardo inland to the Native American town of Joara, where the colonial town of Cuenca and Fort San Juan were established in 1566," Rodning added.

According to the paper, the site was intended to become permanent, but Fort San Juan and Cuenca did not last long. In 1568, warriors from the Native American town of Joara sacked Fort San Juan and Cuenca, as well as other forts established by Pardo and his men. The sites were eventually abandoned and erased from history.

Archaeology is now shedding light on the early alliance that was formed between Pardo and the people of Joara, the collapse of that alliance and the Native American conquest of the Spanish colonial presence in the southern Appalachians at a critical point in the early colonial history of the American South.

Rodning said the archaeological excavations at the Berry site could probably go on for at least another 17 years, if not longer, and there are also other sites in the surrounding area that would be interesting to excavate.

“My colleagues and I are trying to cultivate and to prepare the ‘next generation’ of archaeology students and scholars to continue to pursue excavations at Berry and other sites in the upper Catawba Valley and surrounding areas of western North Carolina,” Rodning said. “What happened there changed the course of American history, and the erasure of the Spanish colonial presence in the southern Appalachians created space for later stages of exploration and colonization by French and English colonists in the American South.”

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- Chris Rodning