

Preserving History Through Archaeology



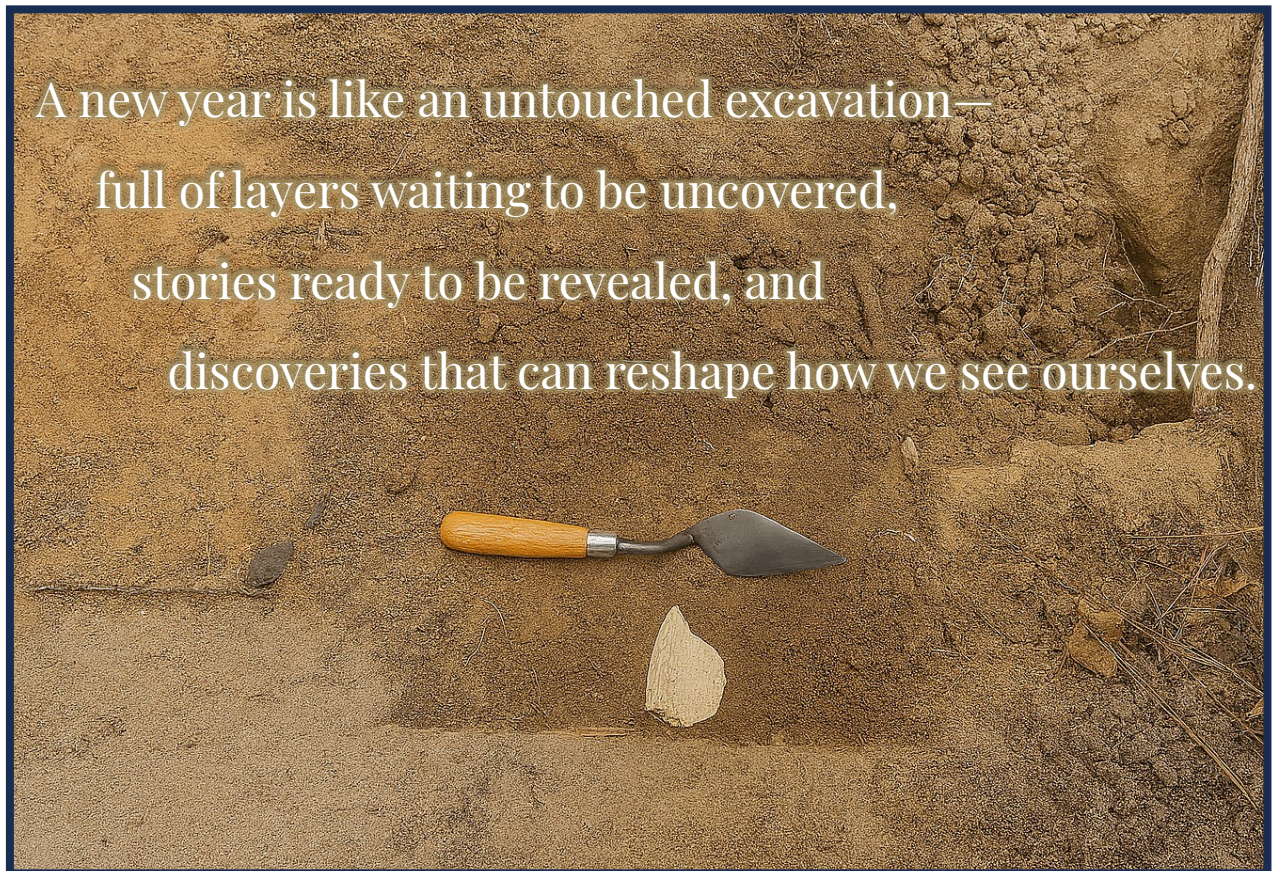
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A new year is like an untouched excavation—
full of layers waiting to be uncovered,
stories ready to be revealed, and
discoveries that can reshape how we see ourselves.



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17th Annual Frontier Faire

The Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS) works to educate the public about local archaeological resources and to advocate for the preservation of important sites. One of its major preservation successes is Fort Daniel, now part of Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation as an archaeological park.

In October, GARS and its sister organization, the Fort Daniel Foundation (FDF), hosted the annual Frontier Faire at the Fort Daniel Archaeological Park. Visitors enjoyed historical demonstrations and interpretations that brought Fort Daniel and Georgia's frontier past to life.

Public education—another key part of the GARS mission—was highlighted as student groups participated in supervised excavations within the fort. GARS President Katie Ahern, Vice President Josh Herrin, and Georgia State University Professor Dr. Jeffrey Glover taught students proper shovel test pit methods and shared the history of archaeological investigations at the site. ■ DMG

SAVE THE DATE: 18th Annual Frontier Faire on Saturday, October 17, 2026.



Visitors enjoying the Faire by participating in the public archaeology activities



Exhibitors and reenactors telling the story of Fort Daniel, Gwinnett County, and Georgia

FIRST LEGO League

In recent months, several local FIRST LEGO League (FLL) teams—often known as LEGO Robotics Clubs—have reached out to the Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS) to collaborate on educational activities. FLL is a hands-on STEM program for students ages 9–14 that encourages exploration of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through the engaging world of robotics. Teams design, build, and program LEGO robots to complete themed missions, while also researching real-world problems and presenting innovative solutions through their annual Innovation Project. The program not only strengthens students’ technical abilities but also nurtures teamwork, creativity, and the FIRST Core Values of discovery, innovation, and cooperation.

The recent theme, “Unearthed,” placed archaeology at the center of the FLL experience. Students were encouraged to imagine themselves as archaeologists and historical explorers as they examine how artifacts, tools, and early technologies reveal the stories of past peoples. The challenge invited teams to think about how history informs the present—and how modern discoveries might shape the future. The robot game reflected this theme as teams program their robots to locate, move, and preserve “artifacts,” offering a fun, interactive way to explore how archaeology works in the field.

To support these teams, GARS officers—especially Vice President Joshua Herrin—met with several clubs both virtually and in person. Tattnall Square Academy’s team visited Ocmulgee Mounds, where they received an overview of the archaeological work carried out at the site. Another group traveled to the Fort Daniel Archaeological Park to dig a shovel test pit and experience a small part of the excavation process (even though no artifacts were found this time). Several additional teams attended the annual Frontier Faire at Fort Daniel, where they explored the fort grounds, learned about archaeological techniques, and saw firsthand how technology and archaeology intersect through demonstrations and hands-on activities presented by both GARS and the Fort Daniel Foundation.

Through these partnerships, students gained a deeper appreciation for archaeology while GARS furthered its mission of public education—showing once again how science, history, and community involvement can come together to inspire the next generation of explorers. ■ DMG

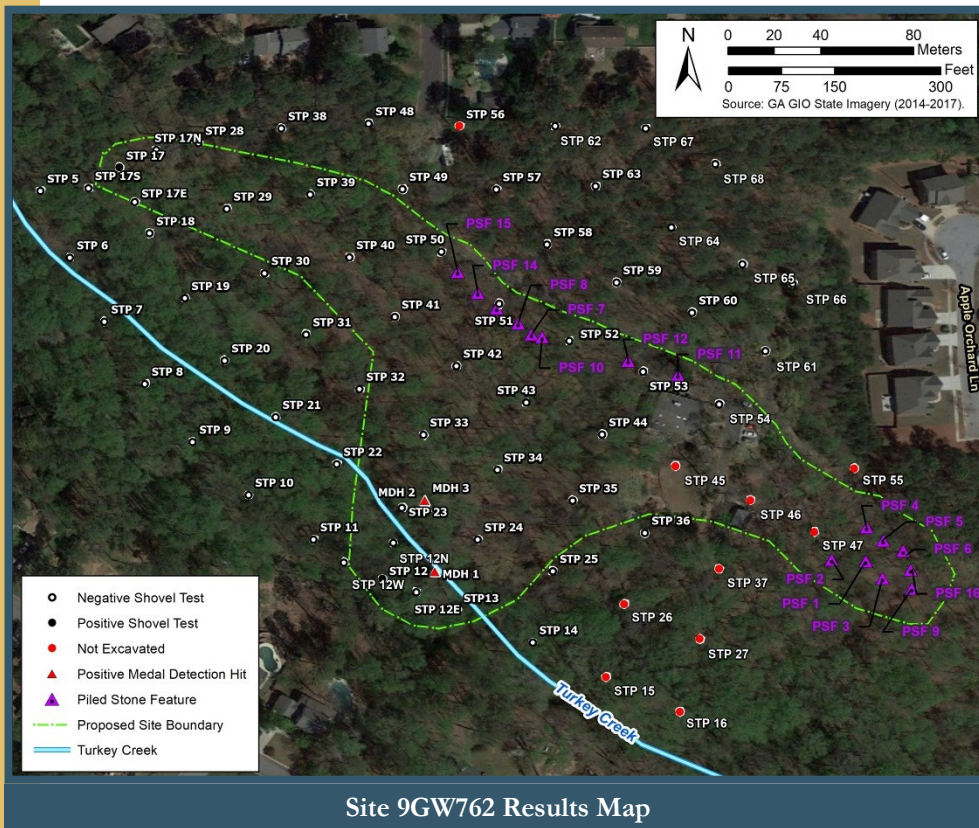


Preservation through Discovery: The Stones That Still Speak

F from a letter written by Dr. Kaitlin Ahern, GARS President, updating the Georgia Historic Preservation Division

The Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS) recently completed a detailed archaeological survey of the Nash Turkey Creek site (9GW762), a ridgetop property containing 16 unusual piled-stone features. After decades of disturbance from looting, land clearing, and utility work, the landowners asked GARS to document what remained and help determine whether the features represented historic farm debris or something far older.

During early 2024 GARS volunteers carried out an extensive investigation: excavating 70 shovel test pits, conducting metal-detector sweeps along Turkey Creek, mapping each stone feature with GPS, and opening a targeted test unit beside one of the most disturbed piles. Although the property was used as farmland into the 1970s, background research revealed no previously recorded archaeological sites within a two-kilometer radius, underscoring the site's significance as a newly documented cultural landscape.



Survey results identified two distinct clusters of piled stones: a heavily impacted western group and a better-preserved eastern group on an adjacent parcel. While three features near an old farm road may relate to historic agricultural activity, most exhibit characteristics consistent with precontact Native construction—such as placement on rocky, non-arable slopes, use of small cobbles that farmers would not typically remove, and similarities to known Indigenous stone-building traditions in the region.

Among all features, Piled Stone Feature 7 emerged as a focal point for both the investigation and the landowners' understanding of the

site's importance. Once a larger structure, Feature 7 has been substantially modified over time: a looter's pit cuts into its eastern side, an erosion channel borders its edge, and scattered stones nearby likely represent displaced portions of the original pile. Its noticeably smaller size compared to other western-cluster features further indicates significant loss of material.

Because the landowners hoped to resolve whether the features were agricultural or precontact—and had considered testing one themselves—GARS selected Feature 7 for controlled excavation. Rather than digging into the pile, archaeologists placed a 50 × 50 cm test unit snug against its undisturbed western edge, allowing examination of the soil beneath the outer stones while avoiding further damage.

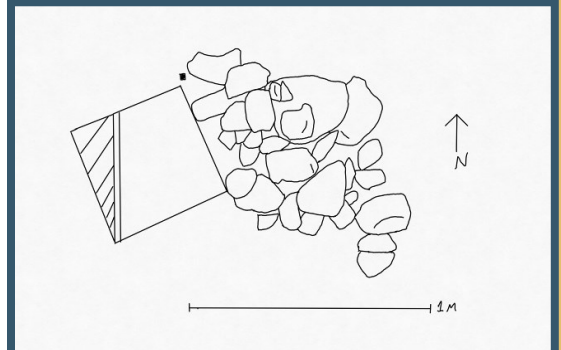
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Excavation progressed carefully, one centimeter at a time. Several precariously balanced edge stones had to be temporarily removed and replaced to prevent collapse. The resulting soil profile proved critical: the stones rested directly atop an intact A-horizon rather than a plow zone or disturbed subsoil. This strongly indicated that Feature 7 predates historic agricultural activity. The soil matched nearby shovel tests, showing no signs of plowing or mechanical alteration. Together with the feature's position on a rocky slope, the presence of cobbles harmless to plow blades, and the lack of cultural material in the unit, these findings offered compelling evidence of precontact stone-building.

Only a handful of artifacts were recovered across the entire survey—two early-20th-century metal fragments and a single quartz flake—reflecting light use of the area across both historic and pre-contact periods. Yet the structural evidence from Feature 7 was decisive: at least some of the piled-stone features were intentionally constructed and placed atop undisturbed soils.

For the landowners, who grew up exploring the creek and surrounding forest, this discovery was deeply meaningful. After reviewing the results firsthand, they chose to establish an ecological trust to permanently protect both stone-feature clusters and the broader landscape. Although no further excavation is needed, the site remains an excellent candidate for non-invasive methods such as drone imaging and LiDAR, which could reveal broader patterns, alignments, or additional features across the ridge. ■ KRA



Piled Stone Feature 7, Looking North (pictured top); Plan View of Piled Stone Feature 7 (pictured bottom)

How LiDAR Could Reveal the Hidden Landscape of Nash Turkey Creek

As the Nash Turkey Creek site moves toward long-term protection, one powerful tool stands out for future study: **LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging)**. This non-invasive, laser-based mapping technology can “see through” the forest canopy to create detailed 3-D models of the ground—ideal for heavily vegetated archaeological sites.

Why LiDAR Matters Here

LiDAR could help researchers:

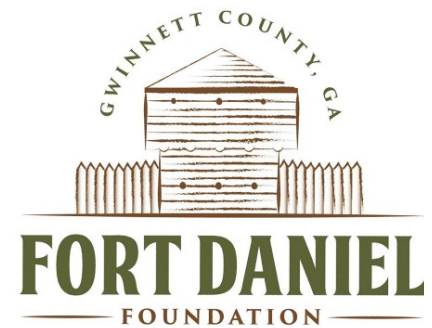
- **Identify hidden stone piles** by detecting small bumps or mounds, even those only a few centimeters high;
- **Distinguish stone clusters from natural rock scatter**, since stones reflect laser pulses differently than soil;
- **Reveal patterns or alignments**—such as circles, lines, or clusters—that might suggest cultural intent; and
- **Map erosion channels and micro-topography**, helping assess how disturbances have shaped the landscape.

What It Could Mean for the Site

LiDAR offers a way to uncover the *full* extent of the stone-feature landscape without turning a single shovel. It could highlight additional features beyond the surveyed area, clarify relationships between piles, and provide crucial guidance for preservation planning.

As the landowners prepare an ecological trust, LiDAR stands to become a key tool in protecting—and better understanding—Georgia's forgotten piled stone legacy. ■ DMG

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UGA Research Redates Middle Georgia's Ancient Monuments

Excerpt from an article by Alan Flurry on the [UGA Web site](#)

Nestled next to downtown Macon, Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park is home to a network of ancient earthen mounds and a timber-built Earth lodge (pictured right) long believed to date to the early first millennium. As one of the Southeast's most important cultural landscapes—and a Traditional Cultural Place (TCP) of the Muscogee Nation—the site has long influenced models for the origins of Mississippian culture.

A new study by University of Georgia researchers, National Park Service archaeologists, and Tribal partners now challenges those long-held assumptions. Their findings point to a later construction date for the iconic Earth lodge and evidence of continuous occupation across the site—contradicting earlier ideas that the area was briefly settled by migrants and then abandoned.



Earlier excavations in the 1930s and 1940s uncovered the park's major earthworks, but only two radiocarbon dates had ever been taken from the primary Native American occupation—one from the Earth lodge itself. The new study uses a series of “wiggle-matched” dates

from tree-ring timbers in the building's roof, producing a clearer construction date in the mid-1100s. The results bring the Earth lodge's history into closer alignment with known Ancestral Muskogean traditions and migration stories.

Beyond redating the site, the project underscores the importance of NPS collections from Ocmulgee and demon-

strates how collaborative research can strengthen connections between descendant communities and their ancestral homelands. Researchers say the work highlights the value of these collections, which remain essential to understanding the site's deep past. ■ UGA

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