

Excavating Joara and Fort San Juan

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In 1986 David G. Moore—an archaeology graduate student from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—began excavations at the Berry site in Burke County. He found a large American Indian town covering about twelve acres, which included the remnants of an earthen mound.

Since 1994, Moore (now a professor of anthropology at Warren Wilson College) and his colleagues, Dr. Robin Beck (University of Oklahoma) and Dr. Christopher Rodning (Tulane University), have conducted a series of digs that indicate that the site is probably the location of Fort San Juan. The remains of five burned buildings are thought to be houses in which Spanish soldiers lived.

The archaeologists have found hundreds of thousands of American Indian artifacts and more than two hundred Spanish artifacts, including broken pottery, nails, lead shot, and glass beads.

Unfortunately, Spanish documents tell us nothing about the appearance of Fort San Juan or about the Native town of Joara. Archaeologists will continue to work at the Berry site for years, to learn more about this forgotten fort and the Native people whose lives were forever changed by the arrival of invaders from Europe.