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Archaeologist tells Kettle Creek group of 2,700-acre search to find Carr's Fort

By Kip Burke
news editor



Describing his successful monthlong search for the site of Revolutionary War-era Carr's Fort, archaeologist Daniel Elliott told the board of the Kettle Creek Battlefield Association last week that he thought he might have to come to them empty-handed.

Archaeologist Daniel Elliott reports to the board of the Kettle Creek Battlefield Association on his search for Carr's Fort.

Thanking the KCBA for their support, Elliot said, "As a result of the last day's work, we've wrapped up our work, we're done. We've found Carr's Fort, we've delineated the location and found different components of the battlefield scene."

Funded by the National Park Service American Battlefield Protection program and the KCBA, the search for Carr's Fort almost came up empty, he said. "This may have been the largest metal-detector survey in the U.S.," he told the board Thursday, "because we

just didn't find it at first. About three-quarters of the way through I thought I was going to have to do some fancy footwork to explain to the National Park Service why I had wasted their money."

The survey covered some 2,700 acres in the Beaverdam Creek watershed, and the first solid evidence of the fort's location was found literally on the last day of the survey in April. The LAMAR Institute archaeology team volunteered to return for a few more days of searching on a promising area, and finally found what they had been looking for.

Last week, the team returned to Wilkes County with groundpenetrating radar equipment to locate the exact location of the old fort's walls. "We had two different areas where we were getting bullets, one of which is the fort, and one is from a house uphill from the fort," he said. "The house uphill from the fort is probably where the American riflemen were, shooting down into the fort."

During the survey, Elliott said, his team located dozens of Revolutionary War-era objects. "We found a Sears-Roebuck catalog of 18th Century artifacts," he said. "We found everything related to living on the frontier, and not many factory-made metal objects. In surveying over 2,000 acres, we had found only four musket balls, so when we found 18 fired musket balls in a 30-acre site, we felt we had found the site of the battle. All of the bullets had been impacted, and the site was occupied for only four or five years, so we feel confident."

After they are cleaned, the artifacts will be kept at the University of Georgia under National Park Service-approved conditions for preservation. It is possible that some of the artifacts could be loaned temporarily for display at the Washington Historical Museum, he said. After returning with ground-penetrating radar last week, Elliott said they found a series of spikes, with linear disturbances, that were apparently walls. The site was less than 75 yards across.

The hardest part of locating Carr's Fort was getting permission from those landowners to survey. "People are kind of wary about letting us on their property," he said. "It's gotten harder and harder to get on private property to do scientific research. We had a lot better response from local landowners than from distant landowners. The local folks seem to have more love for history."

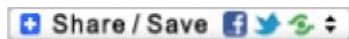
The owner of the land where Carr's Fort was finally located didn't give permission to search until late in the process, he said. The site is on the property of two private property owners, and Elliott said he would be contacting those property owners with the news.

“We hope to assure the landowners of our good intentions,” KCBA Chairman Joe Harris said. “We don’t want anybody to be concerned about condemnation – that’s not on the table at all.”

Finding the location of Carr’s Fort is not the end of possible research in Wilkes County, he said. “During our research on the Battle of Kettle Creek, we found that there were 34 frontier forts here, but this is the only one with a battle. Half a dozen of those forts would be easier to find. There’s potential for more work here – there’s a lot more to be found. Wilkes County is virgin territory when it comes to undisturbed 18th Century sites.”

Elliott told the KCBA board that further explorations are likely, but their help is needed. “We’re getting some momentum, but it takes organizations like the KCBA to keep the interest and awareness up.”

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