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# Ancient Aztalan Times

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The Friends of Aztalan State Park Quarterly Newsletter

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## **Aztalan Friends Receive DNR Stewardship Grant for Visitor Center**

Great news! The Friends of Aztalan State Park has been awarded a \$20,000 matching stewardship grant administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to help finance preliminary architectural plans for a much needed visitor center at Aztalan State Park.

More details inside!

## **Madison Garden Expo**

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Friends of Aztalan volunteered at the Aztalan booth at the 2014 Madison Garden Expo. With the continued cold and snow from a long winter, it was a pleasure to look forward to warmer times and a new season of activity at Aztalan State Park.



## **2013 Excavations at Aztalan**



The summer of 2013 was a busy season for archeology at Aztalan State Park. Two field schools were conducted at Aztalan. Michigan State University professor, Dr. Lynne Goldstein, conducted excavations on the gravel knoll on the southeast corner of the site, and in the area just west of the southwest platform mound.

Later in July, Dr. John Richards from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee continued excavations along the riverbank in the central portion of site in what is believed to be the main habitation area. Dr. Richards also excavated at the northeast platform mound, exposing the excavation trenches from the 1960 excavations.

Many exciting discoveries were made that shed new light on Aztalan. In this newsletter we begin with a great article by Dr. Lynne Goldstein, presenting initial discussions of the result of her excavations.

# Michigan State University 2013 Excavations

*By Dr. Lynne Goldstein*



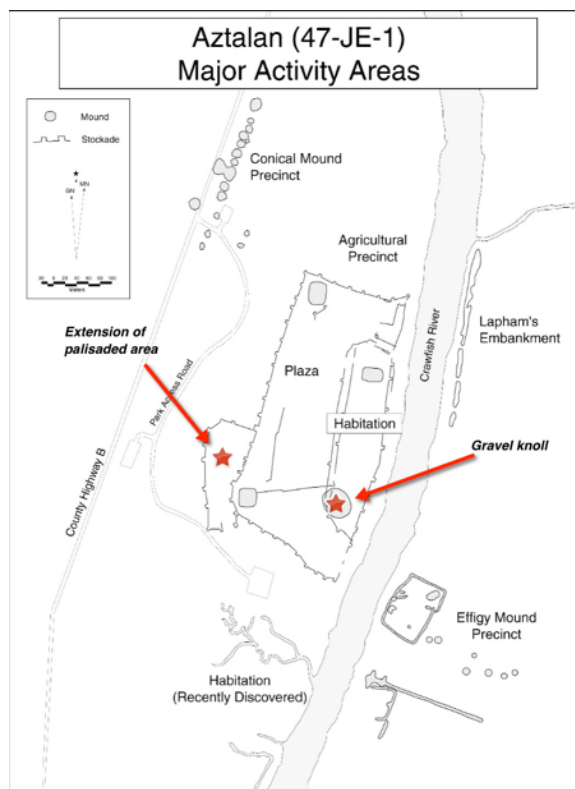
During May and June, 2013, I returned to Aztalan to conduct more excavations. This time, in addition to my own field

school from Michigan State University, Professor Donald Gaff brought a field school from University of Northern Iowa, and Professor Sissel Schroeder brought several of her students from UW-Madison. All together, the 2013 crew included 20 individuals.

Excavations were targeted in two areas: the gravel knoll in the southeast corner of the palisaded area, and the

area immediately west of the southwest platform mound and outside the main palisade – the area of the odd extension of the palisade.

The gravel knoll was excavated in part by Barrett in the 1920s and in part by the Wisconsin Archaeological Survey in the 1950s. The generally accepted



interpretation has been that the people at Aztalan adapted the knoll to use as a mound. However, our discovery in 1996 and 2003 of what I call the “sculptuary” just south of the northwest platform mound brings this interpretation into question. The “sculptuary” is a 3-tiered sculpted surface that included approximately 70 deep oval pits excavated into base deposits. Prior to excavating these pits and sculpting the area, approximately one meter of soil was removed (the removed soil was likely used to build the northwest platform mound).

Patterning within the sculpted surface, its placement within the palisade, and the similarity of remains and features found in the gravel knoll suggested that the knoll may represent a similar feature in the diagonally opposite corner.



In the second area (the area inside the palisade extension), Bob Birmingham had conducted LiDAR survey, and his work suggested that excavation was warranted. Our plan was to determine the nature of this curious walled area.



### What We Found

The gravel knoll was not as expected. The prehistoric horizons are thick,

dense, and complicated. The natural knoll was small, then modified and heavily used prehistorically, with multiple pits, mounded features, distinct fill episodes, and deliberate layers of gravel mixed with shell that capped features.

My idea that the knoll was a similar feature to the sculptuary is inaccurate, but the two areas do resemble each other in their use of gravel and shell.



In the sculptuary, there are a series of pits that were excavated into the gravel after approximately one meter of topsoil was removed. Because of the organic nature of many of the items placed within the pits, the pits themselves were stained black and seemed to have been used episodically – there were distinct layers of debris, as well as matting and clay liners. The tiered surface of light gravel against the dark pits would have been visually impressive. At the knoll, we have different features, and there are a series of overlapping pits and piles,



many of which are capped with a layer of gravel mixed with mussel shell. These would also have been visibly notable features. The shell and gravel mix would glisten in the sun and bring attention to the area. The features show evidence of episodic use and contain lots of animal bone. While it is fashionable in archaeology today to refer to such features as representing feasting, it may in this case be true. Maybe having dinner while watching a game of chunky or participating in community activities?



In the palisade addition to the west of the southwest platform mound, we found significant disturbance of the area, but some prehistoric features are present. We rediscovered the wall of the addition, documenting precisely the wall's location. We also discovered the opening of the addition – a place

where there was a deliberate break or opening in the wall - something that had not been previously documented.



Adjacent to this palisade opening there was a large and deep pit containing lots of both Late Woodland and Mississippian ceramics; the pit was lined with gravel, and there was a long gravel pavement leading to the opening that could have been a distinct path into the area. The features may also represent an opening or closing ritual associated with the palisade. The addition was likely created to serve as a special opening to the palisaded area, restricting and controlling who could enter.

In both areas of excavation, we found that gravel and shell were used in structural and aesthetic ways. The people of Aztalan not only built mounds, they also deliberately sculpted and modified the landscape to meet their needs and represent their views of the world.

## **Friends of Aztalan State Park Awarded \$20,000 Stewardship Grant**

The Friends of Aztalan State Park has been awarded a \$20,000 matching stewardship grant administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to help finance preliminary architectural plans for a much needed visitor center at Aztalan State Park. With the addition of first class visitor center, Aztalan State Park is expected to draw many thousands of new visitors to the park.

The grant was matched by another \$20,000 donated by Aztalan benefactor Elizabeth Parker. Since 2012, Elizabeth has made making dollar for dollar match for donations made towards the visitor center from the trusts of George S. Parker II of the Parker Pen Corp. of Janesville. With the DNR grant, private donations from many Aztalan Friends and other supporters, and matching dollars from Elizabeth Parker,, the Friends of Aztalan State Park has thus far raised over \$100,000. Ultimately the Friends want to raise a total of \$800,000 which is the estimated cost of the structure that will include educational exhibits, a room for school children activities and lectures, office space, and first indoor bathrooms at the park.

In cooperation with the Bureau of Wisconsin State Parks at DNR, the Friends will now be hiring an architect for approximately \$40,000 to provide an architectural concept design for the visitor's center. Later in the year, exhibit plans will be developed by museum professionals for an estimated addition cost of \$10,000. Those wishing to contribute to exhibit planning or for final construction costs can use the accompanying donation form or via Paypal on the Friends secure website at: [www.aztalan.us](http://www.aztalan.us)

## **Upcoming Calendar of Events**

The following is a list of tentative events being planned at Aztalan State Park by the Friends of Aztalan. Please check our website ([www.aztalan.us](http://www.aztalan.us)) for updates.

**May 18, 2pm - Spring Walking  
Tour of Aztalan** with talk about recent excavations at Aztalan. Tour led by Friends of Aztalan Executive Director Bob Birmingham.

**June 21- Solstice Event,**  
Chunkey Game Demonstration, Tim Pauketat would talk about his new book , ideas about Mississippian Astrology.

**July-Aztalan Day,** Kids pottery making day. Joan Slack will demonstrate pottery making for kids. Friends Booth on town grounds. Atlatl Group Demonstrations.

**July-Native American Event,**  
Date TBD. Ho Chunk Dancers, Drummers at Aztalan

**August-Native American  
Event,** Date TBD. Indian Community School, Milwaukee WI. Young Native American singers, drummers, dancers.

**August Kids Day at Aztalan,**  
August 14 (Thursday)-An event during the week for kids, Native American Crafts for Kids. Dream Catchers Craft Event.

## A Message from the President:

Hello everyone and welcome to the latest release and reincarnation of the Friends of Aztalan Newsletter. Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Daniel Seurer, former archeologist, and Lake Mills WI resident.

At the February 2014 Board of Director's meeting I was voted in as the new President of the Friends of Aztalan Board. I look forward to my new role and responsibilities in the organization and continuing the hard work of all the previous members of this post to move the objectives the Friends group forward.

I am no stranger to the Friends of Aztalan. I have been serving on the Friends of Aztalan Board of Directors for the past three years. But most people probably know me best from my photograph of Aztalan State Park.

Archeology is in my blood. From my days in grade school reading about the great adventures of the 19th century Mayan explorations in the Weekly Readers, archeology has always fascinated me. Living in the archeological rich areas of the Pajarito Plateau surrounding Los Alamos, New Mexico in middle school only heightened my enthusiasm for studying the past. This culminated in my receiving a BS degree in Anthropology from UW-Oshkosh, and later a Masters Degree from UW-Madison.

Fast forward 25 years, an ongoing career in the IT field, and I am back participating in a field that I have always enjoyed.

I look forward to many of the exciting projects that the Friends of Aztalan is involved with. The goal of building an interpretive center at Aztalan State Park in entering a new, exciting phase with the matching grants for the Parker Foundation.

In the course of the next year and beyond you can look to some exciting new developments from the Friends of Aztalan. We will continue with our web presence, and will look to leverage various forms of social media (Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, etc...) to increase awareness of our activities. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to email or call me with any questions, concerns, or suggestions we have. This is your organization, and your input is extremely valuable to me. I can be reached by email at [daniel.seurer@me.com](mailto:daniel.seurer@me.com) or on my phone at 608.695.0269.

Plus if you are an archeologist, be forewarned! I may be contacting you for articles related to Aztalan for future newsletters. The wonderful description by Dr. Goldstein of her 2013 excavations at Aztalan has set the bar very high, and I hope to continue with these types of articles in future newsletters.



## Volunteers Needed for Information Center

Once again the Friends of Aztalan will provide a place where visitors can obtain information about the park and the ancient site. It's in the form of a trailer situated at the second parking lot.

The trailer features displays, brochures, books, and merchandise. Visitors can watch the short introductory video produced by Wisconsin Public Television with funding from the Friends of Aztalan.

The trailer will also serve as a center for fund raising for a permanent, first-class interpretive center.

Volunteers are needed this summer to staff the trailer, especially during the week. If you have a few hours to spare to support Aztalan State Park, contact volunteer coordinator Kristine Kust at [Kristine Kust@gmail.com](mailto:Kristine.Kust@gmail.com) or at [608-770-7159](tel:608-770-7159).

Training will be provided and no experience is necessary.



MSU Excavations on Gravel Knoll, Aztalan 2013

## Joining the Friends of Aztalan

### Aztalan State Park Interpretive Center

***Yes, I would like to donate to help build the Friends of Aztalan Interpretive Center Fund.***

Amount \_\_\_\_\_ Your donations are greatly appreciated.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: Friends of Aztalan State Park • P.O. Box 855 • Lake Mills, 53551

Memberships: \_\_\_ Basic (\$20); \_\_\_ Patron (\$50); \_\_\_ Corporate (\$100); \_\_\_ Life (\$250)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: Friends of Aztalan State Park, Aztalan State Park, 1213 S. Main St, Lake Mills WI 53551