

ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

CONNECTING THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE

In our region, field season for archaeologists usually ends when snow covers the ground or frozen soil means no more shoveling. Sometimes we get called out for special projects even after that, but for the most part, winter is a time for analysis, lab work, and report writing.

Besides MVAC staff, our winter workers include community volunteers as well as UWL students gaining career-building experience as volunteers or part-time paid crew, or working on their senior thesis projects or internships. This issue of Archaeology News introduces some current volunteers and students and our new Research Intern, Dylan Chapes, and also includes a feature contributed by one of our volunteers, Peter Sternberg.

Besides wrapping up the previous field season and preparing for the next one, we're also continuing our outreach/education activities and planning our 2026 events. You can stay informed through our Facebook page, website, and monthly e-News. We look forward to staying in touch throughout the year!

EVENTS

Upcoming activities for spring 2026 include:

- **March 14, 2026:** Artifact Show
- **April 9, 2026:** Lecture - Small Things, Shared Worlds: Artifacts, Art, and Social Life in the Ice Age
- **May 2, 2026:** Volunteer Field Survey
- Additional events will be shared on MVAC's website, Facebook page and e-News as they become available.

MVAC AVAILABILITY

MVAC is usually open during regular business hours, but if you would like to visit, we recommend emailing or leaving a voicemail in advance to make sure someone will be available (mvac@uwlax.edu or 608.785.8463).

Archaeology News is a publication of the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center.

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UWL Archaeology student Gigi Atkins and MVAC Research Intern Dylan Chapes repackage flotation samples.



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WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE MVAC LAB?

For over 40 years, MVAC has included volunteers and students in archaeological activities where they can learn about our region's past while helping to preserve it. Long-time MVAC and UWL staffer **Connie Arzigian**, now retired, has been enjoying working with our current volunteers and students, and so have MVAC's Lab Manager, **Mike Bednarchuk**, and other MVAC staff. Some examples--



Volunteer Lynda Morley catalogues historic artifacts from the Historic Indian Agency House in Portage.

Community volunteer **Lynda Morley** has been helping to document artifacts collected during the 2025 summer excavations at the Historic Indian Agency House in Portage, Wisconsin, where MVAC folks (including Connie) have been volunteering to supervise the fieldwork. Recently Lynda has focused on classifying glass and ceramic fragments—identifying them by type of material, decoration, function, and so forth—so we can estimate the items' age and the activities they represent. MVAC historic archaeologist **Vicki Twinde-Javner** has been helping with the IDs. This information will be helpful for the upcoming 2026 HIAH excavations.

UWL Archaeology student **Greysen Reimer** has been documenting a large private collection of artifacts. This work includes classifying projectile points by type and taking measurements of all the points to help provide specific information on the

size ranges and variation in points in western Wisconsin. He's also learning quite a bit about lithic analysis and local raw materials.



UWL Archaeology student Greysen Reimer records information on an artifact collection.

Two other UWL Archaeology students, **Meghan Morey** and **Blake Hanfeld**, gained experience in paid crew positions as Field and Lab Technicians during the summer and fall. Back in their student roles, they're tackling senior thesis projects related to features they helped excavate last summer at a late precontact Oneota site. Meghan is focusing on pottery under the watchful eye of MVAC archaeologist **Wendy Holtz-Leith**. Blake is learning faunal analysis, inventorying animal bone with guidance from Wendy as well as MVAC archaeologist **Lindsay Lentz**, who is experienced with faunal analysis.

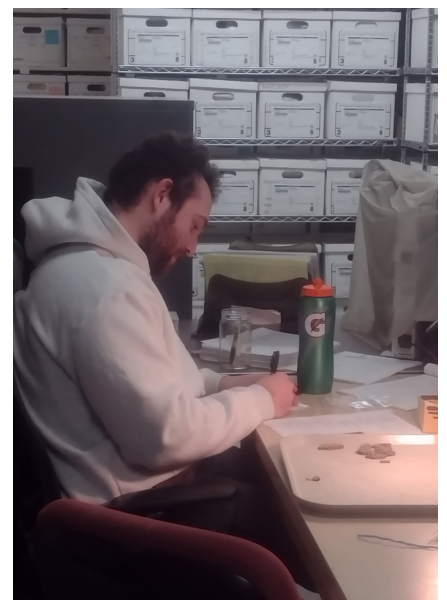


UWL Archaeology students Meghan Morey and Blake Hanfeld working at a local Oneota site during construction (photo credit Micheal Chapes).

MVAC Research Intern **Dylan Chapes**, after participating extensively in fieldwork last year, is gaining new skills and experience in lab work as

well as helping with administrative tasks that keep MVAC running. Currently he's working with Lab Manager Mike Bednarchuk to develop an eye for quartz lithics from northern Wisconsin. Dylan grew up in Wisconsin (Minocqua, Oregon, Waukesha, De Soto) and graduated from UWL with an Archaeology degree in 2023. He joined MVAC in 2025 after working with UW-Milwaukee's Cultural Resource Management (CRM) program and then Colorado State University's CRM program at Fort McCoy.

Community volunteer **Peter Sternberg** (who is also retired faculty from Winona State University) has helped to organize and re-curate several legacy collections as well as spending many hours digitizing and labeling film slides from past excavations. Digitizing slides might not be glamorous, but it's a vital preservation task. Film media degrade over time, and digital backups ensure that even if the slides themselves fade, the information they contain will be preserved for the future. Peter has also been following his passion for fieldwork as a non-MVAC volunteer, as captured in his feature on the next page.



Dylan Chapes catalogues artifacts from a local site.

HAVE TROWEL, WILL TRAVEL: VOLUNTEERING WITH THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PETER STERNBERG

“Is this anything?” It was a hot day in the summer of 2023, and it was about the 20th time I had asked that question to Gosia, the project leader. The object in question was a tiny speck of chert about the size of a fingernail. Patiently, Gosia took the speck from me and looked at it. After a few seconds of close examination, she smiled and said, “yes, that’s a flake.” It was my first find as a volunteer for the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC, notice the W). MWAC does the archeology for National Parks in the Midwest from Arkansas to North Dakota. I was part of a small team doing a pre-burn pedestrian survey of the Heck Table in Badlands National Park, the first of many MWAC projects that I have volunteered on.



Peter's first find, a chert flake.

From its offices in Lincoln, Nebraska, MWAC sends teams of archeologists and archeological technicians to help Midwest national parks manage their cultural resources. Teams spend anywhere from a few days to several weeks working under the auspices of park management on projects that are designed to ensure that cultural remains are recorded and preserved.

Since 2023 I have volunteered every summer on MWAC projects as varied as the parks themselves. I worked on the

Harry S Truman Historical Site to help identify the original outbuildings on President Truman’s family farmstead. I spent weeks in Theodore Roosevelt National Park working in places so remote that the team sometimes needed to spend 30 minutes driving from the park entrance to the end of the road and an hour or more walking up and down buttes and wading across a river just to get to the survey site. I still have sand in the pockets of my jacket from digging shovel tests in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeside and on the windy Manitou Islands off the lakeside coast of Michigan. I helped on a pedestrian survey in Wind Cave National Park where you could see prairie all the way to the horizon in every direction, and where it was obvious from the artifacts we found that people had been wandering back and forth over the area for millennia. I worked in a swamp in Cuyahoga Valley National Park to identify the remains of an icehouse where 19th-century workers cut and harvested ice to be transported along the Erie Canal. I helped to survey an island in Voyageurs National Park, looking for evidence of long defunct logging camps. Just getting to the island involved a 45-minute motorboat ride. Once there we were working in forest so dense that we had to use compasses and walkie-talkies because we couldn’t see each other even though we were only 50 feet apart. We also had to sing and shout to warn bears that we were around.

The teams I worked with have found a large variety of different artifacts, from rusty wire nails and the partial remains of a lumberjack boot to a Paleo-Indian point that is probably at least 12,000 years old. I have hiked for miles over some of the most difficult terrain that I have ever been in. I have heard prairie dogs cheep their warnings as we walked across their towns. I watched a huge black snake circle

gracefully around my test pit and have been stopped in my tracks by a herd of bison. I have also enjoyed the company of some really great people who were always ready to answer my questions, provide dad jokes, and remind me to drink water. I have learned a great deal about field archeology, but most of all I’ve learned how stunningly beautiful and varied this country is.

As I write this in January, I have already been invited back to Sleeping Bear and am waiting for a list of other projects I could volunteer on this summer. These last few years my motto has been “have trowel, will travel.” Volunteering as an archeological technician with MWAC has truly been one of the great experiences of my life.



The find was part of Peter's first project with MWAC, the Heck Table, Badlands National Park pre-burn survey in 2023.



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SUPPORTING MVAC

If you haven't already, please consider renewing your support for MVAC's ongoing mission of discovery, research, education, and preservation. If you would prefer, you can make your donation with our **secure online donation** option through the UWL Foundation. Your support is greatly appreciated!

MVAC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ARE SUPPORTED IN PART BY:

- The United Fund for the Arts and Humanities
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