

Rare artifacts date back thousands of years

LISBON, Conn. (AP) – Some young men were walking along a wooded bike path near the Quinebaug River when they found a black spearhead laying in the soil.

It looked like part of an American Indian weapon. So they asked Richard Rogers, who owns the land, if they could dig for more.

In two weekends, they found 80 spearheads in an area about the size of a small bedroom.

Rogers decided to see for himself. He and his son, now 22,

walked through the woods, and brought a bucket of water to clean their discoveries. Near a stump by the river, Rogers picked up an oval stone a little larger than a silver dollar.

Something was carved in it, and he handed it to his son.

“He cleaned it up and said, ‘This is a face, Dad.’”

The stone was a rare pendant. They had stumbled upon an ancient American Indian encampment and part of a burial ground dated more than 3,000 years ago.

The state Office of Archaeology has excavated portions of the property and found hundreds of artifacts, from stone tools to evidence of a pit where cremated bodies were buried. Radiocarbon dating a method used to estimate the age of remains in an archaeological site places the time of two areas containing charcoal at 3,400 and 4,000 years ago.

Representatives of the Mohegan and Mashantucket Pequot tribes and the Native American Heritage Advisory

Council have visited the site. The Archaeological Conservancy, a private, nonprofit organization that acquires and permanently preserves important archaeological sites across the United States, has looked at it. The conservancy publishes the quarterly magazine American Archaeology.

Andrew Stout, eastern regional director of the group, said the site has research potential and is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

“It’s a great property in that

it is set aside from any major development,” he said. Stout researches sites on private property from Maine to North Carolina about 1,000 properties per year.

State Archaeologist Nicholas Bellantoni said the state has found many American Indian campsites, but few this large. The boundaries are unknown.

“We don’t have many that are intact,” he said. “Many have been disturbed by plowing. Many have had subdivisions built on them, highways.

Here is a parcel that has been untouched, and so the integrity of the place is really intact.”

He said the pendant is a rare find.

“There are very few, even in museum collections,” he said. “We don’t see it often. When I saw this, and all of the stone points they were getting here, I realized there is a lot here that could yield important activity in the past.” The specific location of the dig is not being publicized because of potential unauthorized digging.

At 94, Navajo potter not ready to quit

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) – Rose Williams can’t understand why her family keeps telling her to slow down, take a break, get the rest her 94-year-old body has earned.

So every morning, the Navajo matriarch gets up and goes about the business of melding earth, fire and water into beautifully burnished, collectible pots.

“It’s neither work nor play for her. That’s just what she knows,” explained her great-nephew, Ron Martinez, who accompanied her on a recent visit to the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian.

Williams sat at a table in the museum’s Case Trading Post, next to a plastic bag full of clay dug from a seam near her home in the Shonto area of the Navajo reservation in

far northeastern Arizona.

Her tools were assembled in front of her: a dried corn cob, an old plastic pill bottle – perfect for smoothing the inside of a pot – and small rocks, for polishing.

“Sometimes you’ll find her outside looking for pebbles. She always finds one in this parking lot,” Martinez said.

Williams’ bent fingers grabbed a handful of the clay and deftly worked it, rolling it between her palms into a long coil, then slowly pinching the coil into place atop a bowl-shaped chunk of clay she had just fashioned to serve as the pot’s foundation.

Rows of coils smoothed by the corn cob would form the pot, which would then be fired in an open pit and swabbed with warm, melted pitch from pinon trees.

Williams didn’t know quite what shape this vessel would take.

“I’m going to take my time making this pot, and I’m not sure what it’s going to be,” she said in Navajo, with Martinez interpreting.

Williams’ pots range in size from about 6 inches or so – the traditional size in which to boil herbs for ceremonies – to one that is nearly 2 feet tall, took two months to make and is for sale at the Case Trading Post for \$1,800.

It’s a drum jar, which would be filled with water and have deer skin stretched over the top to form the drumming surface for ceremonies.

Navajo women have been making pottery for hundreds of years for use at home and in ceremonies, although production fell off once trading posts made

metal and plastic cookware available.

Traders rejected the traditional dark brown Navajo pottery as “mud pots,” according to the late Susan Peterson of Scottsdale, Ariz., a ceramics artist who wrote “Pottery by American Indian Women: The Legacy of Generations.” The book was the exhibition catalog for a 1997 show Peterson curated at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, in Washington, D.C.

Navajo blankets and jewelry were more profitable in the tourist market, she wrote. But then museum curators began to take notice of traditional Navajo potters, and Williams was the first to break into museum markets and fairs, in the 1950s, according to Peterson.

Prescription drugs are Indian County ‘monster’

BROWNING, Mont. (AP) – Health officials on northwestern Montana’s Blackfeet Indian Reservation say only about two of 12 patients at the local treatment center are addicted to alcohol.

The rest, they say, are hooked on prescription drugs.

Indian Country officials are now calling prescription drug abuse their “newest monster,” the latest in a series of chemical scourges that started with alcohol, transformed to illegal methamphetamine and is now evol-

ving to pills.

Erma Skunkcap, a substance abuse counselor in Browning, says “It’s affecting everyone.”

Many of the patients buy the drugs illegally, grind them up and either snort them or inject them intravenously.

As a result, Indian health officials say that instances of hepatitis C are rising – a disease that in some instances requires \$15,000 a year in prescription drugs to treat.

Cayugas win appeal in cigarette tax case

AUBURN, N.Y. (AP) – A state appeals court says the Cayuga Indian Nation can continue selling untaxed cigarettes to non-Indians at its two upstate New York convenience stores.

The 3-1 decision released in Manhattan reverses an order by state Supreme Court Justice Kenneth Fisher blocking the sales at the LakeSide Trading stores in Union Springs and Sen-

eca Falls in central New York.

Local authorities raided the stores last November, saying they were violating state law by selling cigarettes without charging the required tax and claim-

ing \$485,000 in state excise taxes. The Cayugas say they are exempt from collecting the taxes because their businesses are protected by their sovereign nation status.

Tribe to dedicate wind plant

McGREGOR, Minn. (AP) – The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe is investing in a new type of wind turbine designed for use by homes and businesses.

On Thursday, tribal officials plan to dedicate a new manufacturing plant where workers will make a part for the Windspire. That’s a vertical-axis wind turbine made by Reno, Nev.-based Mariah Power.

The parts will be as-

sembled at MasTech Manufacturing LLC in Manistee, Mich.

Through its investment in Mariah Power, the Mille Lacs Band will be the exclusive distributor for any Indian reservation buying a Windspire turbine, which costs about \$6,500.

A Windspire is 30 feet tall and spins on a vertical axis unlike the larger turbines seen on wind farms.

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