

in a relatively small space. There are overlapping features that tell us many different groups lived there over thousands of years," Maher said.

"It is fairly rare to find an open site because they are often eroded or plowed away. An 'open' site refers to something out in an open field rather than in a cave or bluff shelter."

He said this is especially rare in North Alabama. Some of the findings date back to 5000 B.C., according to JSU.

"We will not know exactly how significant it is until the excavation ends and JSU completes its investigation. It will take them a good time to do analysis and write a report," Maher said.

He was surprised to hear that at least one tribal group has held a prayer vigil and demonstration near the dig site, which is surrounded by barbed wire and guarded 24 hours a day.

He said ALDOT considered taking an alternate route, but the state will likely proceed as started.

"Everywhere they moved, they hit another site, so it seems irresponsible to open this site and then close it when every looter and grave robber knows where it is," Maher said. "It is not realistic to cover it over and try to pretend there are no bones there. It's not an easy set of choices."

He said the JSU team found bones they could not determine belonged to an animal, so they immediately covered them up and began the legal process of notifying federally-recognized tribal groups to negotiate the removal of human skeletons. Groups that are only recognized in a particular state do not receive this notification.

"[The JSU team] cannot tell at the surface what they are getting into," Maher said. "At some point, the highway department will move forward and do their job. Of all the agencies, the DOT works most diligently to meet its legal requirements to preserve cultural artifacts. They can't please everyone, though."

Local archaeological dig site turns up human remains

By Steven Stiefel
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More details about an archaeological dig near "Dead Man's Curve" have come into focus from Harry Holstein, an archaeologist from Jacksonville State University.

The skeletal remains of "seven or eight" prehistoric human beings have been discovered, the JSU team covering them up as soon as they are found.

"We've found spearpoints from about 5000 B.C., but most of the artifacts are from 1500 B.C.," Holstein said. "It is very significant in being an open site in a field with so many features in a concentrated area. It will tell us a great deal about the cultural mechanisms that led the inhabitants of Wills Valley to change from hunter/gatherers to a more settled agricultural lifestyle."

The information gained through carbon dating artifacts and analyzing pollen will allow JSU to create a unique public-oriented report that will be invaluable to libraries and students learning about prehistoric Fort Payne, he said.

Holstein said there is a lot of misinformation floating around.

"We are not digging up bones. Every grave is left in place, covered and guarded by us. There is no burial mound on the site we've dug up, which will be in the right-of-way for the reconstructed roadway," he said.