



For Peter Peregrine (right), associate professor of anthropology, and his students, the Björklunden estate is an archaeological classroom.

Digging Björklunden

When is a field trip more than a field trip?

By Rick Peterson

Armed with all the appropriate tools of the trade — shovel, screening boxes, and a full-day's supply of curiosity, Brittany Russell approached her first “dig” with the enthusiasm of a budding archaeologist about to uncover the 21st century's equivalent of King Tut's tomb.

Alas, this was only a long-abandoned garbage dump on the Björklunden estate, not a pharaoh's burial spot in the famed Valley of the Kings. And, the highlight of this excavation — a bottle of “Silver Curl,” a 1950ish hair treatment product designed specifically for the “mature” consumer — was in no danger

of matching the worldwide excitement generated by the boy king's booty. But the drama of discovery, not the lack of historical significance, made it just as thrilling for Russell.

"It was great. I had so much fun," says the senior anthropology major from Chicago, Illinois, who was one of a dozen students who spent a May weekend at Björklunden as part of the course *Research Methods in Archaeology*. "It was so much more meaningful to actually get out in the field and apply the techniques we had studied in class to a real-life situation. I ended up enjoying the process so much more than I thought I would. It really gave me an appreciation for archaeology."

When you think "science laboratory," Björklunden may not be the image that first springs to mind. However, substitute pine trees for pipettes, meadows for microscopes, beaches for beakers and you'll see why the pristine 425-acre estate on the shore of Lake Michigan is increasingly becoming Lawrence's largest, and most popular, lab.

Long before Björklunden assumed its higher present profile as Lawrence's "northern campus," biologist Nicholas Maravolo was incorporating the estate's varied vegetation into his classes. In the spring of 1967 — his first as a member of the faculty — when the former owners, Donald and Winifred Boynton, were still using the property's original lodge, Maravolo became the first professor to take advantage of the biological buffet Björklunden offered, carting his *Introduction to Botany* students northward for field exercises. Over the years, Maravolo has expanded his excursions to Björklunden to include his *Vegetation of Wisconsin* and *Physiological Ecology* classes as well as tutorials in plant identification.

"The duration and the intensity of the experience is what separates Björklunden from other field trips," says Maravolo, professor of biology. "It has a spirit that is created by the setting — the waves lapping on the rocks, the gulls calling, walking through the darkness of the cedars, feeling the fog.

"It's that context that's so important. You can see most of the plants we study at High Cliff State Park or Mosquito Hill Nature Center," Maravolo adds, "but it is the environment, the context in which you find them at Björklunden. You get in the middle of those 425 acres and you feel you're in the middle of nowhere."

Mark Breseman, '78, a former student of Maravolo, got a jump-start on his current position as director of Björklunden as a field research neophyte there. During his senior year, Breseman conducted a comprehensive study of all the different tree species and their numbers found on the estate.

"Mark did such a thorough job, we're still using his study as a baseline for classes today," Maravolo notes.

Like their anthropology and biology counterparts, geology and environmental studies students are finding Björklunden to be an ideal setting for studying real-world issues. This spring, Marcia Bjørnerud and Anthony Hoch, associate and assistant professors of geology, respectively, led a week-

end field trip that saw a dozen students collect Lawrence's first set of data on water levels of Lake Michigan and old shorelines. The information will be vital in a seminar next year — *The Rise and Fall of the Great Lakes* — that will study both the hydrology of, and the human impact on, Lake Michigan in particular and the Great Lakes in general.

"You have interesting, raw field materials and a great facility as well. You really have the best of both worlds together," Hoch says of Björklunden. "The lodge is a wonderful teaching facility. It's not just a place to sleep. In fact, when we visit, we typically have as many students sleeping outside as we do inside.

"That's one reason why students are in geology in the first place," Hoch adds. "They like the outdoors and Björklunden is perfect for that type of personality."

Senior geology major Don Smith, with the support of the Chester and Joan Cook Fund for Summer Field Research at Björklunden, spent this past summer exploring strandlines — geologically abandoned shorelines — that dot the estate. During the last Ice Age, mile-thick glaciers blanketed Wisconsin, with their massive weight literally compressing the Earth's crust into the mantle. Since the glaciers' retreat, the Earth's crust has experienced "isostatic rebound" as it slowly returns to its original position. Smith hopes to use some of the 13 strandlines found at Björklunden to determine how much isostatic rebound has occurred since 1907, when the U.S. Geological Survey last conducted a study of abandoned shorelines in Eastern Wisconsin.

The use of Björklunden as a field research destination actually got off to an auspicious start. When ground first was broken for the new lodge, built in 1996, numerous artifacts were discovered, putting the building project temporarily on hold. While halting construction, those findings also gave birth to a new research project — the Björklunden Archaeological Survey. Peter Peregrine, associate professor of anthropology, was summoned to check for "significant remains."

Under his direction and with the aid of students, the entire Björklunden estate has since been archaeologically "shovel tested," which produced thousands of flint chips, but no lodge-preventing significant remains.

"It was unfortunate that we didn't find significant remains that we could have studied for years and years," says Peregrine, "but it's also fortunate that we didn't. Now I don't worry about sending students out for field exercises who know nothing about archaeology because I know they're not going to destroy anything of importance. Finding a few flint chips is just as exciting for them as finding something significant."

Having established a good understanding of the archaeology of Björklunden, Peregrine is shifting his sights to more long-term research opportunities at the estate by creating his own field laboratory of artifacts.

"I'd like to construct things the Native Americans had built — hearths, woven huts, wigwams, garbage pits — and

then burn them down and leave them for future classes to study and see how fast things break down and decay.”

Field research trips to Bjorklunden, whether for an archaeological dig, a forest hike in search of native plants, or a geological survey, routinely draw rave reviews from the participants. Professors typically hear the pleas of students who aren't in their class attempting to finagle their way onto the guest list to tag along for the field work.

“I always look forward to it because I know we'll get a chance to apply what we're learning in the classroom,” says senior biology major Justin Seaman, who made his third trip to Bjorklunden this spring with Maravolo's *Physiological Ecology* class.

“It's a stress-reliever to get away from the campus, but you're still doing the biology. It's just so much more of a hands-on approach to learning.”

While Bjorklunden's natural setting can have an intoxicating effect on all those who visit, Maravolo says the estate can also bring out the best in students. He wistfully recalled a Memorial Day weekend several years ago spent at Bjorklunden when his *Vegetation in Wisconsin* students wowed him.

“This group was so good it gave me chills,” Maravolo recalls. “Students gave reports on their field projects in which they developed an analysis of plant communities they had studied. They made stunning, intellectual presentations. That weekend was and still is one of the most satisfying experiences of my career.”

Much of the credit for Bjorklunden's evolution into the destination of choice for student field research projects, says Maravolo, belongs squarely on the shoulders of long-time Lawrence administrator and former Dean of Students Charles Lauter.

“Chuck had a vision and great passion for the potential of Bjorklunden to significantly contribute to a seminal undergraduate experience,” says Maravolo.

“He worked very hard, especially with young faculty members, to take advantage of the possibilities Bjorklunden presented.”

For many, like Brittany Russell, the process to devout convert is often as easy as a few shovel turns in a dump.

“Being at Bjorklunden for the weekend, working as a team with a common goal, was an unbelievable experience,” she says. “There's something about Bjorklunden that fosters the feeling of a special place. It's definitely more than just a field trip.”

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