

Entertainment

Local archaeology to make 'Indiana Jones' proud Make like 'Indiana Jones' and visit these sites

By Germain Lussier
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The most realistic part of the "Indiana Jones" movies is when Indy is in a tweed jacket and glasses walking around a college campus.

That look of academia is much more like a real archaeologist than the iconic fedora-wearing, whip-wielding treasure hunter we know Indy to be. Don't get me wrong. I'm glad our long-lost action-adventure hero is returning to the screens this week with "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" after almost 20 years away.

But that briefly seen down-to-earth, collegiate Indy would probably adore the Hudson Valley. Since the earliest days of the American Indians, through the times of Dutch, German and English settlers, the Revolutionary War, Civil War and more, this area has been incredibly rich in history. And much of what we know about our region today was discovered through painstaking, real archaeological research.

So if you're looking for an Indiana Jones-style experience, we can't exactly recommend places to shoot missile launchers, run for your life from giant ants or find lost arks, holy grails, temples of doom and crystal skulls, but we do have a few more down-to-earth ideas. For anyone interested in real archaeology, the Hudson Valley has some really rich sites. Here are just a few worth exploring.

The West Point Foundry

Set in the woods off Route 9D in Cold Spring is an awe-inspiring space about two football fields in length.

The West Point Foundry, currently owned and run by Scenic Hudson, was a functioning factory from 1818-1911 and was a hub of the Industrial Revolution. It produced steam engines, water wheels and most importantly, the Parrott Gun used during the Civil War, which is basically a small cannon. Abraham Lincoln visited the site in 1862 to check out its firepower (and you can stand where he probably watched a demonstration), and Jules Verne even mentions the site in the 1865 book "From the Earth to the Moon."

All that information — and much more, including found artifacts, archive photos and an interactive archaeology program — is located not on the site, but up the road at the Putnam County Historical Society and Foundry School Museum. The museum hosts an exhibition on the foundry through Dec. 14. Stopping there first is the perfect primer before walking up the street and into the woods toward the actual site.

"It's a very remarkable, unique and, if you are into it at all, extremely exciting site," says Jan Thacher, one of the museum's volunteers.

Once you turn onto the path, you really do feel like you've travelled into an ancient world straight out of an Indiana Jones movie. A steep, twisting, turning hike of about 250 feet is necessary until you begin to see the large stone structures appear below you. These walls are all that remain above the ground of this massive factory, but the sheer expansiveness of them gives a slight idea to the size of the building. Some spots are roped off as active dig sites, but the rest is pretty much wide open for exploration. The whole site is pretty intimidating, actually, mostly because of its jungle feel and brooding shadows. There are remnants of the blacksmith shop, boring mill and moulding shop. Just up the path a bit is a completely restored 1865 office building. It looks completely out of place because its restoration gives an idea of what this area once looked like. Most of what we know about the factory is because of the work done annually by industrial archaeologists from Michigan Technological University. They come in and study the site both for its historical context and as a learning exercise. In fact, the next batch of archaeologists will be arriving later this week. While they're working, they are reportedly pretty open to questions. They'll also do guided tours of the site on June 14-15.

Where: 63 Chestnut St., Cold Spring (maps to the foundry itself, located a short walk away, can be picked up at the exhibit)

When: Now through Dec. 14, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wed.-Sun.

Tickets: Admission \$5, \$2 seniors

Call: 265-4010



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Visit: www.pchs-fsm.org, www.scenichudson.org

Fort Montgomery State Historic Site

The Hudson River was a key stronghold during the Revolutionary War. With that knowledge in mind, American soldiers built this fort on its shores in March 1776. Several months later, the fort would be destroyed when 2,100 British troops attacked 700 Americans and won.

Today, the 141/2-acre site is marked by a modern-looking visitors center right off Route 9W at Bear Mountain. Inside, visitors can see some of the artifacts that were dug up at the site, a 3-D reproduction of the grounds and mannequins dressed in traditional garb. You can even get a headset for an audio tour of the site itself.

Then, walking out to the actual fort, the spaces get much wider, the rocks sprout out from the ground, and the results of a thorough archaeological investigation are there to be enjoyed. Several platforms and plaques overlook the troops' barracks, outhouses, guardhouses and much more. Each gives a true sense of the space the soldiers had to deal with both before and during the battle.

The area is much more open and less frightening than the West Point Foundry, which rests only a few miles away. There aren't as many trees, so the view of the Hudson is even more spectacular. Most of the actual on-site archaeology is nothing more than foundations now, but each has a real solid look to it that really speaks volumes to the quality of the construction.

Where: Half a mile north of the Bear Mountain Bridge traffic circle on Route 9W, Bear Mountain

When: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Wed.-Sun.

Tickets: Admission \$4, \$3 seniors and students

Call: 446-2134

Visit: www.nysparks.com

The Gardener's Lodge at Bard College

Dr. Jones the scholar would fit right in at Bard College. I say that because the college funds archaeological digs before any new construction on campus because of its location in a National Historic Landmark District. That was how Christopher Lindner, a professor of archaeology at Bard, found a relic of American architecture buried under what was planned to be a bus turn-around.

Linder is used to finding some kinds of archaeological artifacts on his digs. But in 2000, he was checking the area before the proposed Center for Performing Arts was scheduled to go up and he found more than some buttons or pens. He found the foundation of a house.

With only a minimal amount of time to do the work, Linder and his students made massive revelations. They found this high-end cottage was designed by A.J. Davis, whom Linder calls "the most important architect in America during the 19th century." It also had several unique features that proved it to be the first Gothic revival cottage in American history.

Those two pieces of information led Linder to certain conclusions about its significance: "It's high art for a working-class person, and that says something about American democracy in the early to mid-19th century," he says.

Today, the house remains, but is back under the ground. "It's there to be researched sometime in the future when somebody has the right questions," Lindner says. "Preserved."

What stands in its place is an extended panel detailing the works Linder and his students performed. It shows photos of their work, historical drawings of the area and an actual photo of the house. This panel, with another coming this summer at Grouse Bluff, is the first of several that will eventually make up an archaeological walk around the campus.

Reading the panel and experiencing the space gives a true sense that you are, right now, standing in the middle of history. And that's what archaeology is all about: digging in the present to make discoveries about the past.

Where: Blithewood Avenue, Annandale

Visit: inside.bard.edu/archaeology

MORE HOT SPOTS

Still curious about local archaeology? Visit these actual and Web sites for more information.

Olana State Historic Site: This Persian-style home of Frederic Church in Hudson was one of the birthplaces of American art. It also houses a painting with all sorts of "Indiana Jones" lore, a vision of the Khazneh at Petra, which was used at the end of "Last Crusade." Visit www.olana.org for more information.

Mount Beacon Incline Railway: While researching this article, one of the sites recommended to me is the remains of a cable/rail ride that took people to the top of this mountain. However, the hike didn't fit into my schedule. It is certainly something I'm going to check out in the future. Visit www.inclinerailway.org for more information.

Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site: Archaeology played a big part in the maintenance of the home of George Washington during the Revolutionary War as well as the artifacts that are in its museum. Visit www.nysparks.com for more information.

New York Archaeological Council: A site that aims to raise awareness of archaeology in New York state lists sites to visit and local events happening on a monthly basis. Visit nyarchaeology.org for more information.

New York State Archaeological Association: nysaaweb.bfn.org

Institute of History, Archaeology and Education: www.ihare.org

Archaeological Institute of America: www.archaeological.org

'INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL'

Rated: PG-13 for adventure violence and scary images

Directed by: Steven Spielberg

Starring: Harrison Ford, Shia LaBeouf, Cate Blanchett

The story: The famed adventurer is forced to help Russians find a mythic skull that'll give them unlimited power. Along the way he'll encounter old characters, locations and maybe even some alien stuff.

The buzz: Nothing will stop people from flocking to theaters to see this flick since it's certainly one of the most anticipated movies of recent decades. However, early chatter is far from favorable. Movie Web sites such as Ain't It Cool News have published varying reviews including fairly positive (calling it the third best of the series), middle of the road (saying it's fun but unnecessary) and downright evil ("this is the 'Indiana' movie that you were dreading"). The real test will come Sunday as the film world premieres at the Cannes Film Festival. That's when professional critics will get ahold of it and, if they agree with the Internet, "Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" might rival "The Phantom Menace" in the punch line department. Cross your fingers that it doesn't.

Opens: Starts at 12:01 a.m. May 22 at AMCG, DEST, PALIS, PGAL and later at FISH, HUDV, HYDE, MONT. More theaters to be announced.

Review: Read the full write-up in Wednesday's Record.