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# 39th Annual Museum Expedition at Old Cahawba

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA®**

801 University Boulevard | Box 870144 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487 | 205-348-8325 | kim.eaton@ua.edu



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## Media Advisory – 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Museum Expedition at Old Cahawba

**What:** The 39<sup>th</sup> annual Museum Expedition will focus on uncovering the original foundation of Alabama’s first state Capitol – [Old Cahawba](#). Museum Expedition is led by the [Alabama Museum of Natural History](#) and [Alabama Historical Commission](#).

**Who:** Todd Hester, Museum Expedition leader and museum naturalist with the UA’s Alabama Museum of Natural History; Linda Derry, Old Cahawba site director; and Jonathan Matthews, Old Cahawba assistant site director; AHC archaeologists; and Museum Expedition participants

Tours of Old Cahawba will also be available.

**When:** 10 a.m. to noon Tuesday, June 20

**Where:** Old Cahawba Archaeological Park, 9518 Cahaba Road, Orrville, AL 36767

**Media wishing to attend are asked to confirm their participation by contacting Kim Eaton ([kim.eaton@ua.edu](mailto:kim.eaton@ua.edu), 205/348-8325 or 808-640-5912). Reporters must wear closed-toed shoes, pants, mosquito repellent and a hat.**

### Directions:

**From Birmingham:** Take I-65 S to exit 234 for Co. Rd. 87 in Calera. Turn on Spring Creek Rd. (Co. Rd. 12) toward AL-25 S in Montevallo. Turn right onto AL-25 S. Turn left onto AL-139 S toward AL-22 W. Take AL-22 W for 37 miles to Dallas Co. 9. You will see signs for Old Cahawba Archaeological Park telling you to turn onto Dallas Co. 9. Follow signs to Old Cahawba. Visitor Center Address: 9518 Cahaba Road, Orrville, AL 36767.

**From Montgomery:** Take I-85 S to I-65 S. Take exit 167 for US-80 W toward Selma. From downtown Selma, take Highway 22 (Dallas Avenue) west 8.6 miles. Cross over the Cahaba River and turn left onto County Road 9 and follow this 3.3 miles until it dead ends. Turn left onto County Road 2 and follow this 1.5 miles until you see the Visitor Center on the right. Visitor Center Address: 9518 Cahaba Road, Orrville, AL 36767.

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## **Just Beneath the Surface: Annual Museum Expedition Hopes to Uncover Foundation of First Statehouse**

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. – Participants in The University of Alabama’s annual Museum Expedition are hoping to uncover a significant piece of Alabama’s history this summer.

The 39<sup>th</sup> annual expedition will head to Alabama’s first state capital – Old Cahawba, thanks to a joint effort between UA’s Alabama Museum of Natural History and the Alabama Historical Commission.

As part of the state’s bicentennial, expedition participants will help professional archaeologists from the Alabama Historical Commission perform excavations in an effort to uncover the original foundation of Alabama’s first Capitol, said Todd Hester, expedition leader and museum naturalist.

Cahawba was created as Alabama’s first state capital by legislative act Nov. 21, 1818 and by congressional act March 2, 1819. It was carved out of the wilderness on the American frontier practically overnight for this purpose, and it is unique among state capitals because of its unique and imaginative design. William Wyatt Bibb, Alabama’s first governor, reused relic 16<sup>th</sup> century Indian earthworks as the centerpiece of his town plan.

The exact location of the statehouse, however, is unknown, said Linda Derry, site director of Old Cahawba. There are no photographs of the building because it collapsed in 1833, and no drawing or painting of the statehouse done by someone who actually saw it has yet been found.

“We hope to locate the buried remains, determine its exact location and uncover enough details so an accurate image of this important historical structure can be reconstructed in time for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our state,” Derry said.

The public camp is one of three offered by the Alabama Museum of Natural History. The first two – a middle school camp and a high school camp – were held earlier this month at the same site. Participants learn excavation techniques, laboratory procedures and artifact identification. More importantly, they develop a better understanding about the importance of connecting with their past.

“Until you walk where your ancestors walked, you can never truly understand the written record,” Derry said. “Many of the best stories from the past, and many of the solutions to history’s most intriguing mysteries are not found in any book or archive; instead, they lie buried beneath the soil, waiting for archaeology to carefully uncover them.”

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### **About the Alabama Museum of Natural History**

For more than 150 years, the [Alabama Museum of Natural History](#) has celebrated Alabama's natural history through exhibitions, collections and quality programs of teaching, research and service. Museum visitors can explore Alabama through remarkable exhibitions and specimen collections detailing Alabama's natural history and ancient past, or they can venture out and experience Alabama's natural history and its beautiful rivers and trails first hand.

UA's Alabama Museum of Natural History is located in Smith Hall on [The University of Alabama](#) campus and is open to the public Monday – Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Admission is \$2 for adults and \$1 for seniors and children. UA students, faculty and staff are admitted for free.

With thousands of invaluable specimens from all lines of scientific research, the Museum is a lasting monument to the energy, labor and love exhibited by Dr. Eugene Allen Smith. Appointed as state geologist in 1873, Smith spent nearly 40 years surveying, mapping and collecting scientific specimens throughout the state of Alabama.

According to historic records, the cornerstone for Smith Hall was laid on May 28, 1907. Alumni President Hill Ferguson placed in the cornerstone “documents and souvenirs which would help some yet unborn generation glimpse the glory of the day.”

The construction of Smith Hall was completed in the fall of 1909, and it was “formally dedicated with appropriate pomp and ceremony at Commencement, May 5, 1910.”

Smith Hall consists of a three-story central section built to house the Alabama Museum of Natural History, and it has a two-story north and south wing. The north wing originally housed the department of biology and the matching south wing was for the department of geology. Both wings still contain classrooms and labs used by students today. The basement currently houses the Museum's teaching collections and field research equipment.

### **Alabama Museum of Natural History Summer Trips and Day Camps**

**July 7, 10, 15 and 22:** Shark's Tooth Creek Fossils, \$30 each trip

**July 8:** Bear Creek Canoeing, \$30

**July 11:** Tubing the Little Cahaba River, \$30

**July 13:** North River Canoeing, \$30

**July 14:** Coosa River Canoeing, \$30

**July 17-21:** Science Day Camp (grade 5-8), \$150

**July 24-28:** Art Camp Half Day (grade K-3), \$85

**July 29:** Cane Creek Canyon Hike, \$30

For more information, telephone 205/348-7550 or email [museum.programs@ua.edu](mailto:museum.programs@ua.edu).

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### **About Old Cahawba**

Old Cahawba is Alabama's most famous ghost town. It lies at the confluence of the Alabama and Cahaba rivers. In 1819, the town was carved out of the wilderness to be the state's first capital. Although the state changed the location of the capital in 1826, Cahawba continued to grow into a thriving and wealthy river town. In 1865, however, a flood inundated Cahawba, and, in the following year, the county seat permanently moved to nearby Selma. Business and families followed. Within 10 years, houses were dismantled and moved.

During Reconstruction, the abandoned courthouse became a meeting place for freedmen seeking new political power. Cahawba became known as the "Mecca of the Radical Republican Party." A new rural community of 70 former slave families replaced the old urban center. These families turned the vacant town blocks into two-acre fields. Even this community soon disappeared. By the turn of the century, most of Cahawba's buildings were lost to fire, decay or dismantlement. Few structures survived past 1930, but the town was not unincorporated until 1989. By that time, only fishermen and hunters walked the town's abandoned streets.

Today, the Alabama Historical Commission owns and operates this significant archaeological site. Archaeologists recently discovered Cahawba was built upon the remains of an earlier ghost town. Some experts believe the earlier village was "Maubila," the famous Native American village destroyed by Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in 1540. More surprising is the discovery that Gov. William Wyatt Bibb (1819-1820) and his surveyors not only found the remains of this ancient village, but they incorporated the old earthworks into the centerpiece of Cahawba's town plan. Apparently, Bibb hoped to build Alabama's statehouse atop the ancient Indian mound. He planned to use a semicircular moat dug around the ancient village three centuries earlier to restrict the grounds of the statehouse.

For more information, visit [ahc.alabama.gov](http://ahc.alabama.gov) or [facebook.com/OldCahawba/](https://facebook.com/OldCahawba/).

### **About the Alabama Historical Commission**

Located in historic downtown Montgomery at 468 S. Perry Street, the Alabama Historical Commission is the state historic preservation office for Alabama. The agency was created by an act of the state legislature in 1966 with a mission to protect, preserve and interpret Alabama's historic places. AHC works to accomplish its mission through two fields of endeavor: preservation and promotion of state-owned historic sites as public attractions; and, statewide programs to assist people, groups, towns and cities with local preservation activities. For a complete list of programs and properties owned and operated by the AHC, hours of operation and admission fees, please visit [ahc.alabama.gov](http://ahc.alabama.gov).

### **Old Cahawba Upcoming 2017 Events (for more information, visit [ahc.alabama.gov](http://ahc.alabama.gov))**

**Aug. 5** – True Crime Walking Tour

**Sept. 2** – Canines, Camels, Cats & Critters Wagon Tour

**Oct. 7** – Hear the Dead Speak

**Oct. 21 and 28** – Haunted History Tours

**Dec. 2** – Happy Birthday Alabama Presentation

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