

# Uncovering History

Anthropology Professor Bob Goodby digs up the past in the Monadnock Region.

**W**hen considering what it means to be an archaeologist, Professor Bob Goodby describes the profession as a form of time travel.

Using archaeology, Goodby explains, researchers can learn a great deal about the lives of those who came before us; what they ate, how they lived, how they made and used the tools so essential to their survival.

“Once you have some of the basic outlines of their lives, you can begin to use empathy,” says Goodby, who is entering his 23rd year on the faculty at Franklin Pierce. “You can imagine what was it like for those people to live in a tent for an entire winter at the end of the ice age — in Keene, New Hampshire. That to me is one of the aspects of time travel. It’s not just the material things, but the ability to humanize and empathize.”

Goodby has been researching and documenting the history of the Abenaki people of the Monadnock Region for the better part of the last four decades. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the professor decided it was time to finally record his findings in one place. The result is *A Deep Presence: 13,000 Years of Native American History*, recipient of a 2022 silver medal in the multicultural category from the Independent Book Publishers Association.

During his time at Franklin Pierce, Goodby has explored at least 20 different sites in the Monadnock Region with his students. His book focuses on four of those excavations. The first was at the Swanzey Fish Dam, a large stone structure in the Ashuelot River that Goodby and his charges were able to trace back to its construction 4,000 years ago. The Raft Bridge in Peterborough, along the Nubanusit River, is where Goodby found evidence dating back to settlers from 5,000 years ago. Hinsdale, New Hampshire, is home to the Wantastiquet Mountain site — also 5,000 years old — which Goodby calls “a really interesting one, because we have layer upon

layer of artifacts and, in every layer, we have the bones of timber rattlesnakes.”

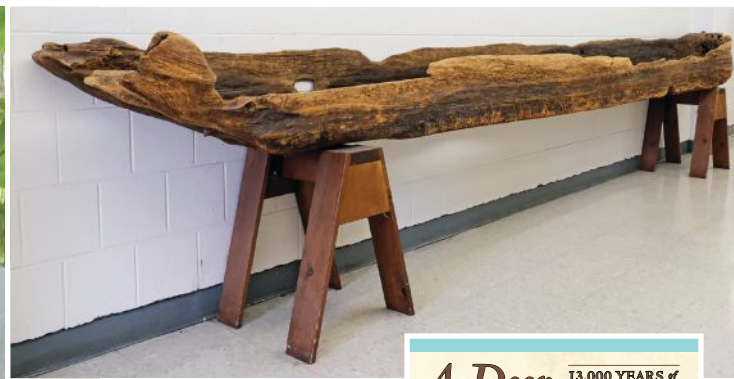
It’s the final location detailed in *A Deep Presence* that Goodby identifies as “the site of a lifetime.” In 2009, he was hired by the Keene School District as a consultant prior to construction of a new middle school. In his book, Goodby writes, “Standing there, it was hard to imagine that this would soon be a bustling, modern middle school campus with over 600 students, and it definitely didn’t occur to me that I was standing on one of the most significant Native American sites in New Hampshire.”

With help from FPU students, who were brought on as paid excavators, Goodby uncovered traces of the homes in which four different families spent the winter at the end of the ice age. The professor believes the individuals who once occupied that Keene Middle School site were the very first humans to inhabit the area.

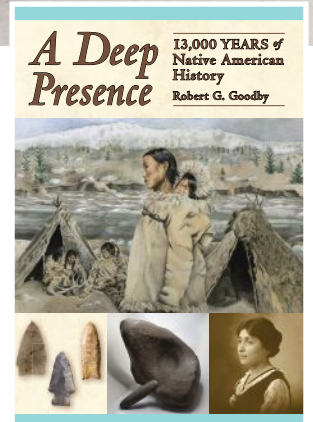
“At 12,600 years old,” Goodby shares, “it’s the oldest dated site in New England.”



ANDREW CUNNINGHAM



Wooden canoes on display in Marcucella Hall date back nearly 500 years, according to carbon dating undertaken by Prof. Bob Goodby and Micheala Topham '22.



Through his work, Goodby has found evidence of continuous occupation of the Monadnock Region during that period; that the cultures and habits of those people changed over time; and that they had connections to other Native American communities all across North America. And he's not done digging yet.

While working with Michaela Topham '22 on her senior thesis last year, Goodby and Topham researched a pair of wooden canoes on display in Marcucella Hall that were found in Laurel Lake in Fitzwilliam in the 1960s. Using a radiocarbon dating lab in Florida, the duo determined that there was an 80% chance that the canoes were built between 1516 and 1674 AD.

"In the last few years," Goodby says, "we decided to focus on the area around campus, which sits on the divide between the two major river drainages in New Hampshire – the Merrimack and the Connecticut. It's a place where Native people traveling by canoe might have crossed. We've gotten permission from the towns of Rindge and Jaffrey and a private landowner to test on four locations around Contoocook Lake and, at all four locations, we've found Native American sites. It really shows us that Native history is not only on the big rivers, but it's right here. It's all around campus."

—Jana F. Brown