

Group stabs at history with ancient hunting tool

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Green Waggener shows off his skills with an Atlatl, a prehistoric weapon, as Mike Thoman of the Florida Archeology Network looks on Saturday during National Archeology Day at the Florida Archeology Network in downtown Pensacola.

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National Archeology Day 1

The thing about throw with the atlatl, Mike Thom

explains to Bettylou Reid as she aims at a target turkey, is that it's not so much about power as it is accuracy.

Thomin is the manager of the Destination Archaeology! Resource Center on Main Street next to Bartram Park.

Reid was among a small group that attended a presentation and demonstration of an ancient hunting tool called an atlatl (pronounced at-LAT-ul) at the historic two-story building on Saturday.

The event was put on by the Florida Public Archaeology Network, a statewide organization administered locally by the University of West Florida and headquartered in the same building.

The hourlong presentation focused on the history and functionality of the atlatl, and offered an opportunity for attendees to try their hand at throwing the ancient dart-flinging device. The event was put on for International Archaeology Day, which was Saturday.

"Part of what archaeology can do is help us fill in a lot of answers that maybe the historical documents can't necessarily answer," Thomin explained. "It helps us put together the puzzles that often happen with history."

The atlatl, Thomin explained, was a hunting and war-making tool used around the world that allowed ancient man to throw large darts, what Thomin called "arrows on steroids," with power and accuracy.

It is essentially a 2-foot-long stick with a handle on one end and a notch for a dart on the the other. The user docks and pinches a dart and then flings the atlatl forward from behind the head, hopefully sending the dart flying.

Green Waggener, one of Saturday's attendees, teaches exercise science at UWF and saw the atlatl as an early form of modern technology.

"In exercise science, we look at ways to improve people's performance with what they call ergonomic aids," Waggener said. "This was an early ergonomic aid for getting supper to the plate."

With her own dart loaded and ready to go, Reid, donning a Florida Gators visor, cocked her arm back and let loose the 4-foot dart. Her aim was good, but the missile fell just short of its target. In fact, no one at Saturday's event was able to hit the target.

"We debated, but we decided to miss the game," Reid said of Saturday's Florida-Missouri college football game. "Because this is once a year."

Reid's husband, Randy, was quick to note that the couple were recording the game but didn't want to miss such a unique opportunity.

"It's great any time you get to play with toys," he joked. "It's one of those things that if you're not really involved in history, you think we went from spears right to bows and arrows, but this is a complete intermediate technology."