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## Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

# Conference Review: Reconstructive & Experimental Archaeology Conference REARC 2012

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Author(s): Darrell Markewitz <sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> The Wareham Forge, 307377 Centre Line, Proton Station ON, N0C 1L0, Canada.



The third annual Reconstructive & Experimental Archaeology (REARC Conference) was hosted by the Schiele Museum of Natural History at Gastonia North Carolina, USA, 19-21 October 2012.

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participation in any such event. I certainly came the furthest, some 1400 km (or 16 hours of drive time) from Central Ontario, Canada, but drive times over 8 hours were common. This may have affected the overall attendance, with about 60 people in total, about a third of these students. The smaller size of the gathering, however, proved one of its most positive qualities. You could easily find any individual and engage them in conversation, which is exactly what happened.

A total of eight formal presentations were given, along with six hands on workshops, poster based presentations, and a keynote lecture. This programming packed the available time. The presenters were drawn from professional academics, independent researchers and senior students. Topics ranged

from the highly technical (*A Study of the Effects of Weathering on the Geochemical Signature of Southeastern US Rhyolites Using PXRF Analysis*), to general overviews, and reports on more experiential topics. All of the speakers approached their topics with enthusiasm and obvious passion, which in turn made all the presentations engaging and thus captured the interest of the participants. If there was any weakness in the programing it was that everyone was trying to pack so much information into the short time frames!

With so much of North American archaeology focussed on Pre-Columbian cultures, the four presentations with a European connection and the two demonstrations of European Early Medieval technologies were great additions. Unfortunately, I missed the keynote lecture by Dr Bill Marquardt, as I needed time to prepare for the afternoon demonstrations.

The hands on workshops were an obvious draw for the participants. Two of these definitely stood out. Neil Peterson's demonstration of a possible Viking Age glass bead furnace allowed individuals to make their own glass bead. Almost everyone at the conference tried their hand at doing so.

Doug Mayer led a session that demonstrated the construction and use of a simple bamboo tube blowgun. The students especially participated in this – the result being that the only thing saving the local squirrel population was poor aim.

Other sessions included flint napping, open fire ceramics, rope making and an iron re-melting hearth. The general opinion of all attending was that the hands on opportunities added considerably to not only illustrating on-going experiments, but also directly improving personal understanding of specific materials and methods. At one point Steve Watts said "Today Museums are collecting objects, but tomorrow they will be collecting technology".

Coming in from outside the normal academic community, as a serious but still 'amateur' researcher, you are always uncertain just what kind of reception you might receive at a conference of this type. What was wonderful about Re-Arc 2012 was the way everyone was so enthusiastic about not only their own work, but also how easily parallels were being drawn between various experiments. Everyone was genuinely interested in hearing about each other's trials, successes and especially failures! No matter what the specialty, there were always lessons and insights to be gained.

The presence of so many undergraduate and graduate students most certainly contributed to the overall energy of the gathering. With some humour one instructor quipped "If you want students to come, make it a course requirement". The general feeling for all was that the participation of what will become the next generation of experimenters and researchers was one of the most positive aspects of the conference. "Students make the future".

Sunday's open discussion on the possible future of Re-Arc brought forth many good, positive suggestions for both developing future conferences and the organization itself. Some of the best observations came from the participating students, ideas that hopefully will be implemented for the 2013 conference:

- One significant element is that the Schiele Museum has committed to hosting future conferences.
- Considerable discussion was made about expanding the use of the Internet, both for communications but more importantly for information sharing / publication.
- Consideration was given to how to better recruit and involve students.
- A discussion was made about forming closer ties to the EXARC organization in Europe.
- Ensuring solid programming for future conferences through an earlier call for papers, plus expanding the physical demonstration / hands on component.

Although a smaller conference, there is no doubt the generally informal atmosphere at Re-Arc 2012 was one of its greatest strengths. The enthusiasm of the participants was certainly addictive. Being able to share common problems and discuss similar approaches with others transcended individual topic areas. It left you feeling that you are not alone in your personal passion for ancient technologies.

#### Link(s)

<http://www.rearc.us>

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## | Corresponding Author

**Darrell Markewitz**

The Wareham Forge

307377 Centre Line

Proton Station ON, N0C 1L0

Canada

[E-mail Contact](#)

## | Gallery Image





FIG. 1. GLASS BEAD MAKING WITH NEIL PETERSON. PHOTO: BILL SCHINDLER





FIG. 2. FORGING A BLOOM WITH KAT MUELLER AND DARELL MARKEWITZ. PHOTO: BILL SCHINDLER





FIG. 3. BLOWGUN DEMONSTRATION WITH DOUG MEYER. PHOTO: BILL SCHINDLER