

georgetown view

MAGAZINE

Features and special columns for and about the people of Georgetown, Texas

The Gault Archaeology Site

January 3, 2020 [AnnMarie Kennon](#) [Leave a comment](#)

You will find no place to visit in Central Texas as unique as the Gault Site in Florence.

Technically, there is no place in the entire western hemisphere of the planet as unique as the Gault Site.

3433 FM 2843, Florence • [GaultSchool.org](#)

Tours by appointment Mon-Sat

Even your friends who are fifth-generation Texans are newcomers. Some really smart scientists say humans have gathered at the Gault site for about 18,000 years. It contains the earliest evidence of human settlement—the oldest art and the oldest “house”—on the continent.

First excavated in 1929, on farmland owned by Henry Gault, this dig is 30 minutes from Georgetown. For \$10 a person, you can take the tour, see artifacts that pre-date *writing* by 10,000 years, and enjoy hearing how discoveries in our own backyard change everything you thought you knew about early modern humans.

Around the world, Gault is a rockstar of research and reconstruction. It has long contributed to our understanding of human evolution; how early modern man adapted and reacted to the bounty of Central Texas.

Executive Director Dr. Clark Wernecke says, “Part of our mission is to educate people about what archaeology is, and why it really matters. It is the shared path we all have and is an important building block for where we’re going in 100 or 1,000 years.”



Dr. Wernecke demonstrates what he calls “a paleolithic version of the iPhone 6 and the iPhone X”. Even stone tools were constantly upgraded and old ones were discarded at the site.

THE PEOPLING OF THE AMERICAS

While some accounts differ as to who migrated where and when around the world, archaeologists working at the Gault site have been able to date many of their artifacts with all manner of scientific methods.

You may have heard of carbon-14 dating, but, among other things, the tour at the Gault site will introduce you to a laser technique that can determine when a single grain of sand, from deep underground, was last exposed to sunlight. Remember in 2018 when

Saharan dust clouds gave us pretty sunsets? Those clouds have been coming here for, yes, 20,000 years, settling into the Texas soil, and were dug up by Gault experts.



Since 1929, the Gault Site has been excavated, scientifically and publicly dug, looted, and preserved. Archaeologists, hobbyists, and volunteers have unearthed more than 2,300,000 artifacts from just 3% of the site.

Dr. Michael Collins purchased the land in 2006 and immediately donated it to the Archaeological Conservatory. He says the site is a “stratographic package” of time and space that is distinctive. *Clovis* was previously believed to be the earliest people in the Americas. Gault has artifacts contemporary with the Clovis, above a layer completely void of artifacts, then another deeper layer some call the “Florence culture”.

Still, we don’t want to include too many spoilers in this story. The fascination and entertainment is best left to Dr. Wernecke, who is as committed to this treasure trove of history as he is excited to share it with people of all ages who wish to know more about it.

The education is definitely worth the drive, but, worst-case, you’ll enjoy a beautiful day in the quiet of Florence. Imagine a child’s face when history comes off the page as tangible objects he or she can identify, and wonder about the person who left it there

milliennia ago. Dr Wernecke says, “It gives us a perspective of the time-depth of humans, not just on the Earth, but right here in our neighborhood.”

The Gault Site is private property, so tours must be scheduled.

Contact the Williamson Museum for regular tours. For a class or private group of ten or more, contact Dr. Wernecke cwernecke@gaultschool.org.

Private tours are first-come-first-served.

Length, activities, and program differ, but visitors can expect to spend about 3 hours and cover 1-1/2 miles. At the end of the tour there is a picnic area and gift shop.

HELP FOR GAULT

Last month, the Gault Archaeological Site had a special visit from some of the people who are helping to bring visibility and awareness of this local treasure. Commissioner Valerie Covey, TX Representative Terry Wilson, and Congressman John Carter went on the tour with the AP World History students from Florence High School, and spoke to them about what each can, and plans to do, to help with research and more.



AP World History students from Florence High School had some distinguished guests on their tour in December.

Dr. Wernecke explained that while archaeologists use a great deal of scientific method and technology, much of their work is about interpretation of their findings and piecing together things from the past. As such, they struggle to procure funding and grants from STEM and other scientific sources. The Congressman said, “There is a lot of money nationwide, but it is very competitive. But if the Gault school wants some, we will help them. This is a real jewel and everyone can help just by talking about it. This is a dream area and we need to keep it going.”

You probably live on land just like this. If you dug down far enough, you might find something (but don't go digging up your parents' grass).

Congressman John Carter

Ben Daniel, Chair of the Florence EDC was also on the tour. He added, “We are not creating this phenomenon, we are just recognizing something unique and wonderful about Florence. Even the science shows that this was an aggregation site; people have been coming here to hunt, make tools, and maybe even celebrate for 18,000 years. When people come here to visit, they will feel it too.”