



# Hoosier National Forest Highlights



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## Living on the Edge: the German Ridge Heritage Project



By Angie R. Krieger, Forest Archaeologist

The German Ridge Heritage Project, a collaboration between Hoosier National Forest and Indiana University, began this summer to document the lives and culture of early settlers in the German Ridge community of Perry County, Indiana. These people were “living on the edge” as they farmed these narrow ridges.

Dr. Timothy Baumann directed a University field school to teach students how to research historic records and systematically investigate these 19<sup>th</sup> century farmstead remnants through archaeological excavation. This area was first settled by English, Irish and Scottish Americans moving up from Kentucky in the 1820's and 1830's. By mid-century, immigrants from Germany populated the area. German American descendants still live in the area and have been generous in sharing family stories and photographs which contribute to the goals of the project.

Over the next few years we plan to excavate several farms to better understand how they were organized and to what degree we can identify a German “signature” from the archaeological evidence. Interpretive signs placed at these farmsteads and the associated church, cemetery, and school will convey what we learn to the Forest visitor. Because of its close proximity to the Ohio River Scenic Byway, we will highlight the settlement and encourage travelers to take a break, get out of their vehicles, and see a bit of southern Indiana history.

This summer we focused on the overall history of German Ridge, Tobin Township and Perry County. We developed a website ([www.germanridge.info](http://www.germanridge.info)) and Facebook page

(German Ridge Heritage Project) to post archival documents like population census records, family histories, maps and cemetery records. We also investigated the farmstead originally occupied by Randolph and Miranda Connor Hall and later by John and Lisette Debus.

The Hall/Debus site is located adjacent to the German Ridge Trail. When inhabited it was clear of trees but over time has returned to woods. The subsurface of the site was initially explored by digging a grid of post holes to identify cultural features and high artifact density areas. Remote sensing equipment was used to measure magnetics and responses to electrical charges. The read-outs were analyzed for “anomalies” that suggest features or characteristics worthy of further exploration. The use of that data allowed us to focus our time on hand excavating several one by one meter units. The soil in these units was hand scraped in ten centimeter levels and screened. Photographs, notes, and plan view and profile maps documented the findings. A topographic site map was created with a total station.

The main feature of the site is the basement of the house. The foundation was built of coursed limestone obtained off-site. The house had an extension added to the back during the later Debus occupation as evidenced by the abundance of wire nails which replaced earlier square nails. The house probably had a covered porch that faced west. A diagonal anomaly identified in remote sensing was determined to be a rock walkway from the back of the house.

Other features include a collapsed cistern, spring box, remnants of an outbuilding and barn, and a narrow ditch that could be some sort of drainage or access feature. Artifacts were found on the surface and in the test units. These “forgotten items” include medicine bottles, window glass, stoneware containers and ceramic plate fragments, metal pans and buckets, buttons, watch cogs, a porcelain doll foot, and lots of square and wire nails. Results of field work are on-going.

For more information contact Angie Krieger, Forest Archaeologist at 812-276-4748 or [akrieger@fs.fed.us](mailto:akrieger@fs.fed.us).

The Hoosier National Forest is Indiana’s National Treasure. Come out and explore.



Excavated walkway left of tree root.



Artifacts found at the home site displayed in a screen.



Dr. Monaghan teaching students to identify soils.



Defined cellar foundation.