

Colorado Daily

The independent press for CU and Boulder since 1892

IDEAS ON CAMPUS

Academic or fringe?

16 Nov 2004

PRE-COLUMBIAN CELTIC COLORADO EVENT ON CAMPUS TODAY IRKS SOME CU ACADEMICS

By ERIN WIGGINS
Colorado Daily Staff Writer

A more than 25-year-old debate on whether Europeans were in Colorado before Christopher Columbus's 15th Century arrival in America is surfacing again, this time at CU-Boulder.

Tonight, researcher Phil Leonard and documentarian Scott Monahan will present a lecture titled "Pre-Columbian Celts... in Colorado?" on the CU-Boulder campus to attempt to prove to students and faculty that Celts, an ancient European tribe that spanned the breadth of continental Europe, were in Colorado before Columbus' arrival in America. They say Colorado history books may need to be re-written to reflect the possibility.

"We're continuing to find a great deal of evidence and have

updated old evidence," Leonard told the Colorado Daily Monday. "We really need this taken on by professionals and carried on from there."

But professionals, who Leonard defined loosely as academic anthropologists and archaeologists, tend to refute claims that sites in Colorado contain Ogams, an ancient form of Celtic writing found in ancient Ireland and Scotland. Some at CU-Boulder think Leonard and Monahan's theory is a waste of time for them and their students.

"It's not supported by any kind of scientific evidence and I think the community is owed that," CU anthropologist and doctoral student Mark Mitchell said Monday. "Debate and controversy are important, but it needs to be done in the context

"It's not supported by any kind of scientific evidence and I think the community is owed that," CU anthropologist and doctoral student Mark Mitchell said Monday. "Debate and controversy are important, but it needs to be done in the context of the intellectual tradition the university is trying to uphold."

CELTS: Profs scoffing

[CELTS, from page A4]
of the intellectual tradition the university is trying to uphold."

Modern archaeology and anthropology states that Native Americans made the Colorado markings. Mitchell said asserting the markings were made by Europeans and not the natives who claim them is also politicizing the issue.

"There are no professional archaeologists who would take this claim seriously," CU anthropology professor Doug Bamforth agreed.

While Bamforth said freedom of speech allows such events to take place on campus, he added there are much more worthwhile scientific research concepts to bring to CU.

"If I was going to spend campus money, I'd spend it on something else," Bamforth said.

The Cultural Events Board (CEB), which is cosponsoring the event with the newly formed Gaelic Heritage Student Association, paid Leonard and Monahan approximately \$3,500 in student fees to visit the campus tonight.

According to Louis Savage, CEB vice-chair, there was definitely some question about the

legitimacy of the speakers, but he said the board does not "define" what culture is or isn't.

"We are definitely aware this is far-fetched," he said. "But it's not in our job description to censor the cultural events our student groups put on."

While the anthropologists say they hope students who attend will take the Celtic theories as opinions, not facts, Leonard and Monahan said they expect to impress people with evidence and visuals they will present tonight.

Monohan, who was a Denver television journalist before becoming involved in the issue, said he thinks some academics are too entrenched in their interpretations of history, making them unable to embrace new ideas.

"The resistance we've encountered is from those who simply have not taken the time to look at the evidence," said Monohan. "With younger students in particular, they're much more open minded, and it's refreshing to see that."

The event is tonight at 7:30 p.m. in Humanities 150 with a reception and food to follow. It is free and open to the public. For more information, contact CEB at (303) 492-3227.

Modern archaeology and anthropology states that Native Americans made the Colorado markings. Mitchell said asserting the markings were made by Europeans and not the natives who claim them is also politicizing the issue.

"There are no professional archaeologists who would take this claim seriously," CU anthropology professor Doug Bamforth agreed.