

## Hands-on research takes science teachers to the field

Christy Moody and Mark Jennings of Taylor County High School, along with Vaughan Early of Taylor Middle School, joined District public use coordinator Edwin McCook and Myles Bland of Bland and Associates, an archaeological and historic preservation and consulting firm, on an excursion to Drew Mansion in Madison County to examine the remains of its cemetery using ground penetrating radar (GPR).

GPR operator Chris Taylor demonstrated how the machine is used to detect objects, changes in material, voids and cracks below the ground.

"The use of radar technology for an on-the-ground application is the type of realistic science that I look for to use as a hook to generate interest in science in the classroom," Jennings said.

A critical goal in this program is the opportunity for teachers to experience inquiry science by doing research with experts in the field and to incorporate this information into the classroom to create an inquiry-based environment.

"The intention is to have teachers work side-by-side with scientists with the hope that the teachers will come away with ideas for classroom activities that more closely approximate the work of real scientists," Moody said. "My hope is to be able to expose my students to current science issues and to give them inquiry-based assignments so that they learn to use the critical thinking skills scientists use as they approach, analyze and solve real world problems."

Archaeology is not the only branch of science that Moody, Jennings and Early have been exposed to while participating in this program. They also performed gopher tortoise surveys and monitored vegetation in the area while working with Beau Willsey, a biologist with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The Florida Department of Education awarded the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium a math and science partnership grant in the amount of \$1.48 million to conduct and manage the program. Funds will be used to pay teacher stipends, travel and assist with supplies for each work site.

Approximately 100 teachers from Madison County to Escambia County have participated this summer. Teachers were divided into teams and had the opportunity to choose from a variety of activities that encompass almost every field of science.