University of Idaho graduate student Idah Whisenant points to locations that could have possibly been a wood pile and a log chute when Pen d'Oreille City was active as a waypoint town around 150 years ago. Whisenant discussed the findings of the archaeological investigations that were conducted at the historical site last year during a presentation Saturday in the Bayview Community Center. The Mary Moody steamship, which transported travelers from the city across Lake Pend Oreille to the Clark Fork River, is also seen in the historic photo. (DEVIN WEEKS/Press)
More than 340 artifacts have been collected and analyzed from the historical site at the south end of Lake Pend Oreille that was once known as Pen d'Oreille City, a little waypoint town that served as a stopover for travelers heading to the Clark Fork River and into Montana and British Columbia gold territory.

Idah Whisenant, the University of Idaho graduate student who led the charge on the archaeological dig of the site last year, said one of the most exciting parts of this project has been "being able to learn more about not only Pen d'Oreille City, but what occurred at the site after that, and being able to share that with others."

Pen d'Oreille City (which differs in spelling from Lake Pend Oreille and the neighboring town of Ponderay) was the second permanent Euroamerican settlement in North Idaho. The Mary Moody steamship harbored there, carrying pack trains to their destinations across the lake.

The town had a hotel, store, saloon, supply warehouse and a blacksmith shop, but it was always a transient place, and it declined as gold mining waned and railroads dominated the transportation industry.

"The exact location of Pen d'Oreille City buildings remains elusive, but the project has yielded new insights and it appears the location of Pen d'Oreille City has been used for some length after it was founded in 1866 and died out in 1870," Whisenant said. "Photographs and maps of the Pen d'Oreille City location give an exciting glimpse into history."

She shared that her favorite artifact finding was the remnant of a small boot that had a heel made of stacked leather, which gave her a better idea of its age than other found items.

"The date I had for it was likely late 1800s," she said.

Whisenant revealed her Pen d'Oreille City findings to about 60 people Saturday in the Bayview Community Center, many who asked questions when her presentation was finished.

"Where was the shoe found?" a curious attendee asked.

Laurie Mauser, Kootenai County Historic Preservation Commission Action Commission chair, stood up from her chair in the audience to answer.

"In the saloon," she said, many chuckling in response.

The excavation, metal detection, feature recording and other forms of analysis of the Pen d'Oreille City site showed Whisenant and her colleagues that the location has been used for woodcutting, cement-making, military training, and homesteading, and those who used the site would partake in drinking beer and soda, hunting, possible target practice and domestic activities.

The analyses of the site have also given clues about where wood piles and redirected streams may have been, if log chutes were used and how people from different eras used the site for recreation.

"I very much enjoyed seeing the results of the investigation that I followed with interest last summer," said Robyn Edwards of Bayview, who asked Whisenant whether it would be possible to learn even more about the history of the site.
"The most interesting features of the presentation for me were not necessarily the results of the investigation on the ground, but the historic photographs that have been gathered that relate to this location," she said.

Mauser said the documents detailing the site's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places should be available on the KCHPC's website, www.kcgov.us/departments/hpc (http://www.kcgov.us/departments/hpc), by the end of summer. Whisenant's findings will also be available through a link on the KCHPC's website within the next few months.