

State-line Battle over Boulder leads to Court

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FRANKFORT -- An Ohio historian could face hard time, all because of a rock.

A Kentucky grand jury indicted Steve Shaffer on Thursday for leading efforts to pull an eight-ton boulder known as Indian Head Rock from the Ohio River.

The indictment accuses Shaffer of breaking Kentucky law by removing a protected archaeological object, a felony. He could face one to five years in prison if convicted.

"I'm really surprised," Shaffer said. "It's not about historic preservation, we all know that. It's about revenge."

The rock's removal triggered a dispute between Shaffer and elected officials in Kentucky who insist it belongs in their state. Shaffer says he saved it from being damaged or lost forever. It now sits in a city garage in Portsmouth, Ohio.

The rock was once a navigation marker and an attraction for locals who ventured out to carve their names into it, but it hadn't been seen since the 1920s.

It remained mostly submerged until September, when Shaffer led the crew that pulled it from the river, which forms a border between Ohio and Kentucky.

The rock has carvings of initials, names and a crude face that some claim is a petroglyph carved by an unknown American Indian.

It was registered as a protected archaeological object with Kentucky state government in 1986. Greenup County Commonwealth's Attorney Cliff Duvall said the case is not about the fate of the rock, but whether it was removed without a proper permit.

"What's important is that all of these things be protected and that the law of Kentucky be observed," he said.

Shaffer, an Ironton, Ohio, resident, plans to fight the charge.

Kentucky Rep. Reginald Meeks, a Louisville Democrat, said the indictment was expected.

"This is what we had been working for," said Meeks, who sponsored a resolution condemning the rock's removal and calling for its return. "Perhaps now those individuals who are involved in this over in Ohio, and the media, will take this more seriously."