Recent Investigations at Odessa Yates (34BV100),
A Plains Village Site in the Oklahoma Panhandle

This summer, from July 31 to August 18, Scott Brosowske and Richard Drass taught an archaeological field school co-sponsored by the University of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Archeological Survey. The field school, at the Odessa Yates site in Beaver County, Oklahoma, was attended by sixteen students from the University of Oklahoma, the University of Tulsa, Texas A&M, the University of Kansas, Washington University, and Louisiana State University. Dave Maki and Geoff Jones of Archaeo-Physics LLC of Minneapolis, Minnesota were also on hand to conduct additional geophysical survey, and aid in coring, mapping, and excavation at the site. Although the field school was half as long as those typically offered by OU, the dedicated crew was able to excavate portions of three pithouses, a storage pit, and a possible field hut under the hot and dry August conditions.

The 2000 excavations represent the third season of formal investigations at Odessa Yates (Figure 1). Shortly after the site was recorded in 1998, a shallow subsurface geophysical survey was conducted by Archaeo-Physics LLC. This preliminary survey successfully identified numerous cultural features, including pithouses and storage/trash pits. The 1999 field season focused on the excavation and testing of four house structures identified at the site through geophysical survey. Recently, two of these structures yielded dates of A.D. 1280 and A.D. 1300. All of the artifacts recovered at the site were representative of the Plains Village period (A.D. 1100-1400) and included Washita and Fresno arrowpoints, beveled knives, bone horticultural tools, decorated and undecorated ceramics, and a large number of trade items derived from the Eastern Pueblos of New Mexico. A major goal of this summer’s work was to examine features present in several areas of this large site to further understand the spatial variability represented at Odessa Yates. The information gathered this summer will be used to examine the interrelationship between intertribal exchange and Plains Village subsistence economy.

The first three features examined during the 2000 field school were designated Features 2000-1, 2000-2, and 2000-3. They were located through multiple geophysical prospecting techniques and/or the presence of positive crop marks – that is, locations associated with buried cultural features where vegetation...
tion grows taller and thicker than in the surrounding area.

Feature 2000-1 was a circular, two meter diameter structure with a central post and a small basin shaped hearth (Figure 2). This feature was a smaller, and much shallower, version of pithouses typically seen at the site and was tentatively identified as a summer field hut. Following the abandonment of this structure, Feature 2000-1 was filled with midden debris consisting primarily of burned rocks, bone, ceramics, ash, lithics, bone tools, and shell. Feature 2000-2 was more complex and represents a series of overlapping pithouses and storage pits. Although a single pithouse was the focus of the one by two meter test unit excavated at 2000-2, shovel skimming and extensive hand coring provided additional information on the spatial relationship of surrounding features. Feature 2000-3 was a plaster lined, bell shaped storage pit about 1.5 meters in depth. Like other features excavated at 34BV100, once this storage pit was deemed no longer useful it was filled with trash.

The two other features examined this summer (2000-4 and 2000-5) represent abandoned pithouses along the northern and eastern margins of the site. Both of these features were identified through geophysical survey conducted during the 2000 field school. Once identified, each of these features was subjected to a systematic coring program which aided in the placement of one by two meter test units. Although the excavation of test units at Features 2000-4 and 2000-5 yielded little information regarding the architectural layout of each house, they will provide the information necessary for intrasite comparative studies.

Despite the short field season, students were exposed to a wide variety of archaeological techniques. Each day, students took turns excavating, screening, mapping, drawing profiles, photographing artifacts, and helping conduct the geophysical survey using a soil resistance meter, a gradiometer, and a ground penetrating radar. The use of geophysical survey is still fairly uncommon in the United States, making this field school one of the few in the nation where students got hands-on training with these techniques! Casey Carmichael (OU graduate teaching assistant) also spent several days teaching students how to conduct reconnaissance survey and record archaeological sites. Lauren O’Shea (OU senior) supervised a field laboratory set up at our crew house near the site. Here, students learned to sort and catalog artifacts, maintain field records, and process flotation samples. In addition to all the activities listed above, students also spent time completing daily journals, giving site tours, and listening to guest lecturers, including Doug Wilkins, Bobby Nickey, Lee Bement, Kent Buehler, and Pete Thurmond.

Besides all the instruction that took place during the week, students also visited two well known Plains Village period sites on weekend field trips. The first weekend, students visited the Roy Smith site, the easternmost Antelope Creek phase (A.D. 1100-1450) settlement known in Oklahoma. This site was excavated by Dr. Robert E. Bell of OU’s Department of Anthropology in 1965 and represents the only multiple room Antelope Creek structure in the Oklahoma Panhandle. The landowner and his wife gave us a tour of this amazing site and provided cool drinks and homemade cookies following the tour. The second weekend, students visited the Buried City complex, a Plains Village settlement along Wolf Creek in the Texas Panhandle. Doug Wilkins led the tour of these sites and outlined the long history of archaeological investigations at the Buried City. In addition, students also visited the Museum of the Plains and the Courson Oil and Gas Office (both in Perryton) to view artifacts recovered from along Wolf Creek.

All in all, the 2000 field school at Odessa Yates was very successful. The students learned a great deal about panhandle archaeology, survived some pretty harsh conditions, and got to know a local community that is incredibly supportive of this research. We cannot say enough about folks like Ronnie and Teresa Bowles, Randy Cates, Harold and Kirk Courson, Kimmie and Becky Karber, Harold and Joann Kachel, Steve Parker, Russell and Mary Tibbetts, Dicky Yates, Forrest and Ellen Yates, and many others, whose help and support made this research possible. Thank you.

For those of you interested in more information about the 2000 Field School at the Odessa Yates site, please visit our web page at: www.ou.edu/cas/archsurv/

Scott Brosowske

THE ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

The most visible activities of the Archeological Survey have been in the area of research. Whether we are studying 10,000 year old Folsom bison kills or late prehistoric Plains Villagers,
the Survey has a notable record of accomplishments in Southern Plains archaeology. Somewhat less publicized, the efforts of the Community Assistance Program in preserving and protecting important elements of Oklahoma’s cultural heritage have also gained state and regional recognition. In addition, I am certain that many civic groups and public schools have gained new glimpses into our state’s prehistory and early historic from the Survey’s educational outreach. Besides its activity in research, preservation, and education, the Archeological Survey expends considerable effort in another area that goes largely unrecognized, that of managing the vast quantities of information concerning the archaeology of Oklahoma. The information is diverse, but largely deals with research and management issues.

The Survey serves as the central repository for archaeological sites recorded in Oklahoma. As they are found and reported, detailed site forms are completed for previously undocumented prehistoric or early historic sites. The information from this form is subsequently coded and entered in a database containing roughly 50 categories of information pertaining to the site. These include its archaeological characteristics, significance, site integrity, environmental setting, and physical (legal) location on the landscape. All this information resides in a Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software program supported by the University of Oklahoma. The program has broad applications in statistical analysis and computerized mapping, as well as basic data management. Currently, there are 17,221 sites in this database divided into the six management regions. The number of sites increases at a rate of about 300 to 500 a year (depending on how much survey work occurred during a given year). The information in this database can be used for a variety of purposes. For example, we can use the files in management to determine how many sites are on the National Register of Historic Places or how many have been vandalized. For research purposes, we can examine information such as the location of Washita River phase villages in respect to soil type or elevation. The sites can even be exported to GIS (Geographical Information Systems) software where their UTMs can be used to place them on the landscape.

Another database contains radiocarbon dates. Here, the Survey has about 900 dates with information on 35 variables concerning the cultural affiliation of the site, its location, type of material dated, provenience of the material, and, of course, numerous categories of information pertaining to the date. This information is stored in a DBASE III+ program. The database can be exported to SAS where various aspects of the dates can be analyzed. Recently, we retrieved all the radiocarbon dates run on Caddo sites in the Red River drainage. The DBASE III+ program is very dated (pun intended), and we need to move our files to a more sophisticated system. There are also approximately 100 - 150 dates that have not been added to the system. One of our goals in the immediate future is to bring this database into the twenty-first century.

As State Archeologist, I annually review between 350 and 500 archaeological reports. These reports range from three to five page survey reports of one acre bridge replacements to 300 page studies of excavated sites. All of these reports, though, contain information that may be useful at a later date. For example, even the shortest, smallest report will contain basic facts on the type of project, the size of the area examined, the vegetation cover, what kinds of methods were used to examine the location, whether sites were recorded or not, and the recommendations for the project. A file called the Small Scale Survey database was created about 10 years ago. At that time, we went back through our records and entered all the previous survey information. Currently, there are approximately 7500 records in this file. It can be used to determine how many acres have been surveyed by county or in total across Oklahoma. We can also use this information to identify the amount of survey, testing, and excavation work conducted in various counties or to see how successful shovel testing has been in finding sites.

The last database that the Survey maintains is the National Archeological Database (NADB). NADB is a federally-run program for registering archaeological reports that are generated by state. Thus, each record in this database contains information on the author and title of the report, the type of work that generated the report, and similar information to that in the Small Scale Survey database. I might add that this includes not only contract reports, but research publications as well. NADB has about 10,000 references in two different files. It is our goal to have these publications available on-line for the professional community to use in their work. However, the structure of the federal software has posed some problems in accomplishing this. It will probably not take place until NADB is placed in a new software system such as ACCESS or ORACLE.

It is difficult to project the future direction for our database compilation efforts. Ultimately, they might be placed in a GIS where this information can be viewed visually as well as in a text format. Regardless of direction, the Survey will continue to maintain these files and use the information to aid us in our research and management activities. Robert L. Brooks

2000 STATE FAIR OF OKLAHOMA

The Archeological Survey sponsored a booth at the 2000 State Fair of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City between September 15th and October 1st. The booth was sponsored in conjunction with the State Historic Preservation Office and the Oklahoma Anthropological Society and could be found in the Outdoor Oklahoma Building. The theme for this year’s fair was Oklahoma Archeology, Pottery: Pieces of the Puzzle. One of the attractions for this year’s fair was a mammoth tusk excavated near Alex in Grady County during 1999 and impressively restored by Society member Dave Morgan. Richard and Mary Ann Drass designed the poster for the fair around the theme for this year. In addition to free posters, there were two exhibits: one presenting a chronological overview of the state’s prehistory and early history, and a second on prehistoric ceramics from various areas of the state.
The Survey, Preservation Office, and Anthropological Society also distributed brochures and bookmarks. It is estimated that at least 4800 people came by our booth during the 17 days of the fair, based on the number of posters handed out. We had interesting discussions with numerous residents from around the state and hopefully increased people’s awareness of archaeology.

There are a number of individuals who merit special mention for their efforts. Lisa Stambeck, Survey secretary extraordinaire, handled scheduling of persons for the booth as well as numerous other duties. Finding volunteers for 17 days is no small accomplishment. We also want to acknowledge Phillip Pigg for a record number of days volunteered. Debbie Farris, Survey accounting specialist was also responsible for getting the booth paid for in a timely fashion. Lastly, we wish to extend our sincere appreciation to all those who volunteered of their time to make this a successful venture at the state fair.

Robert L. Brooks

RETIREMENTS

Most members of the archeological community in Oklahoma have been working here for at least the past 15 - 20 years. Thus, retirements have been something of an unusual event. However, two archeologists retired this fall. Marshall Gettys retired from the Oklahoma Historical Society at the end of September. Marshall had been with the OHS for the past 25 years and with the Historic Preservation Office for the past 20. A specialist in historical archeology, Marshall will be doing consulting work for the Federal Emergency Management Agency assessing historic buildings. The other person scaling down their activities is Stan Bussey. Stan retired from Atkins Benham Environmental (formerly Roberts/Schornick & Associates) at the end of October. We will miss Marshall and Stan, their senses of humor, and their concern for Oklahoma’s heritage.

Robert L. Brooks