Spring 2025

# the Community Archaeologist

# OKLAHOMA PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY NETWORK

*"Creating and connecting communities in service of heritage."*

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Front Cover: "*A collection of projectile points belonging to Pat James*". Photograph provided by Lewis Dolmas.

## About OKPAN:

The Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network, or OKPAN, is a program of the University of Oklahoma that serves as your connection to archaeology in the state of Oklahoma. We bridge all of Oklahoma's communities with an interest in the past while promoting education, understanding, and outreach. At our heart, we aspire to promote a respectful exchange about Oklahoma's past.

## About the Magazine:

*The Community Archaeologist* is a digital magazine that highlights the heritage and history of Oklahoma's many communities. The goal of the publication is to offer accessible, educational content that increases readers' awareness of Oklahoma's past and the many ways it intersects with the present. We foster a multidisciplinary approach to content creation that encourages contributions not just from professional archaeologists but also from students, traditional knowledge holders, and members of allied disciplines. We strive to elevate diverse voices and to center issues important to disenfranchised communities, particularly members of Oklahoma's tribes and other descendant communities.

## Additional Staff:

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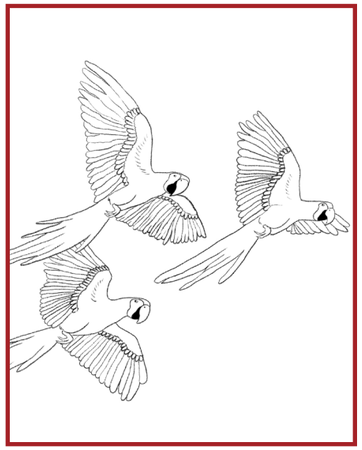
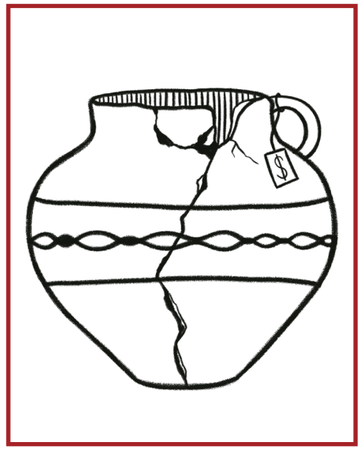
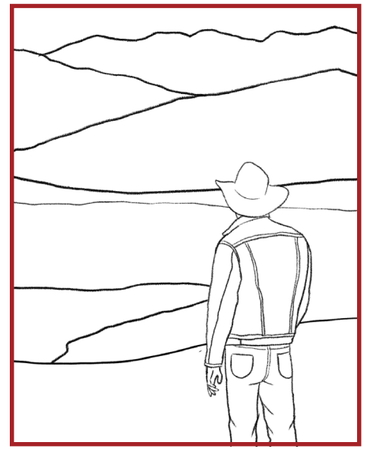
# In This Issue









# Dear Reader,

Welcome to the fifth issue of *The Community Archaeologist* (*TCA*), published twice yearly by the Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network (OKPAN). OKPAN fosters conversations about archaeology and heritage among members of the many Oklahoma communities that care about the past (you can read more about OKPAN here). The organization does this through a variety of programs, and *TCA* is its most public-facing initiative.

The stories in this issue of *TCA* emphasize the critical relationships archaeologists cultivate and nurture with non-archaeologists who share their passion for understanding the past through the materials and sites left behind by people who preceded us. In her piece, OU professor emerita Pat Gilman tips her hat to the many avocational ("hobbyist") archaeologists and students who helped her build her career and shape her research trajectory. OU graduate students Lewis Dolmas and Noah Powell follow, with articles that both emphasize the crucial role that owners of private artifact collections can play in archaeological research.

This issue also features a Q & A with Dr. Bob Pickering, a long-time University of Tulsa-based archaeologist and museum professional, who recently published a new book called *Luck is a Fortune*. And, finally, we feature a photo-essay tribute to Colorado's Gunnison Basin. Why the Gunnison Basin? That is my primary field-research area, and it is also where Noah Powell has elected to focus his attention. Moreover, *TCA* editor Chelsy Lyons has deep ties to the region. The three of us simply wanted to share its beauty with all of you.

We hope you enjoy these stories, and we would love to hear your thoughts and questions. To share your thoughts, questions, or article ideas, please email us at thecommunityarchaeologist@gmail.com.

**Sincerely,**

**Bonnie Pitblado, PhD**

**Robert E and Virginia Bell**
**Professor of Anthropological Archaeology**

**Director, Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network (OKPAN)**



# Dear Reader,

We are overjoyed to share the Spring 2025 issue of *The Community Archaeologist.*

Our magazine is stronger than ever as we have matured our editorial vision, grown our social media presence, and sharpened our content since our last publication. As we continue to build our digital platform and embark on academic publications in the coming year, *TCA* has truly soared to new and exciting heights!

In this issue, we explore the pivotal role of community involvement in archaeology and scholarship, from students to ranchers and private collectors. This concept of breaking apart barriers between academics and the communities that we work with is essential to the mission and heart of our organization. At *TCA* we aim to be community builders—never gatekeepers.

We are also delighted to include, for the first time ever, a photo essay. As we reflect on the influence that the Rocky Mountains have had on many members of our staff and contributors, we are thrilled to introduce a new level of content for our readership, broadening the mediums that *TCA* uses to tell stories of archaeology, Oklahoma, and community.

With gratitude, our spring publication is an exciting step towards the excellence and inspiration that we strive for. As always, we welcome your feedback and suggestions, which can be sent to us via email at thecommunityarchaeologist@gmail.com, as well as by taking our survey here.

**Sincerely,**

**Horvey Palacios, Editor-in-Chief**

**Chelsy Lyons, Associate Editor**

**Editorial Team, *The Community Archaeologist***

# COLLECTIVE DISCOVERY

## How Community Archaeology Shaped My Career

**Patricia A. Gilman**



In those earliest days of my career, *connection* and *community* had already become pivotal to progress

Upon earning my PhD in 1983, the future of my dissertation research was complicated by one little detail: I didn't have a job, and, as a result, I very quickly learned about the value of avocational archaeologists and what they can and do contribute to academic research.

Luckily for me, I had worked on an excavation project with Betty Lee, an avocational archaeologist who kept asking me to come tour sites around the town of Safford in southeastern Arizona. When I finally obliged, Betty showed me several Puebloan sites; however, she didn't know of any pit structure sites, which was what I was interested in; but another contact did: I knew the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) archaeologist in Safford, Gay Kinkade, who had run the first archaeological survey that I was on. He knew of a huge pit structure site in the San Simon River drainage on BLM land southeast of Safford, and he wanted it tested. BLM had planned to build some soil retention dams in the area, and one of these would impact the site; suddenly I had a path forward. In those earliest days of my career, connection and community had already become pivotal to progress.

*An excavated pit structure at the Timber Draw site in the San Simon drainage.*

With small amounts of BLM funding and Gay's support, I started my first independent research excavation project. I had no access to students through a university, and so a critical factor was the assistance in the field and in the lab of about a dozen avocational archaeologists from the area. Without them, I would have had no project. I remain grateful to them for their enthusiastic assistance through the heat of May and June in southern Arizona. At that point, little archaeological work had been done in the San Simon, perhaps because it is in the low desert many miles from Tucson; and so we learned a lot and we also had fun.

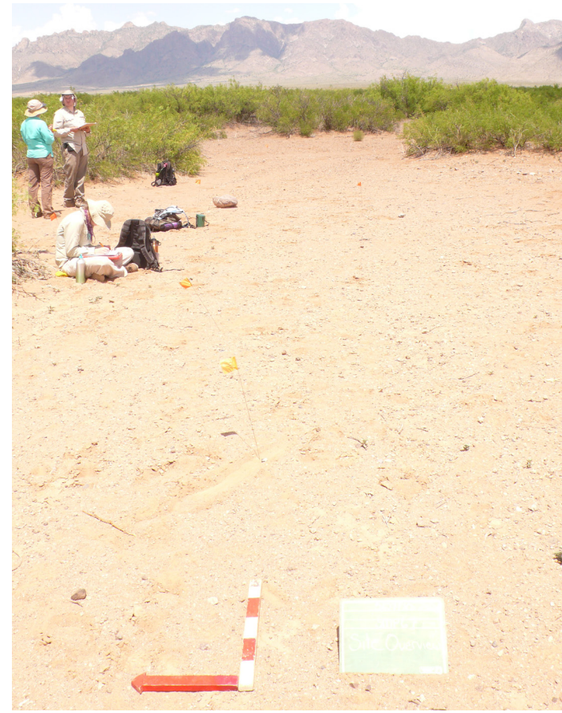
Since those days in the San Simon, one of the changes I see in archaeology is that avocational societies are suffering today because most of the non-archaeologists who are interested in the subject—and have the time to pursue it—are older now. I don't see younger people (by younger I mean people in their 50s and 60s, for example) taking their places. Some of this lack of interest may be because most societies do not do excavation projects anymore, although they do surveys and site recording, rock art recording, and site stewardship. I worry that the kinds of support avocational archaeologists give us professionals will not exist in the near future, impacting both budding careers and community-driven excavation.

My own research was made possible by this now fading avocational approach. For my dissertation, I focused on the transition from pit structures to pueblos that occurred across the Southwest; that is, the change from below ground, single family structures to above ground buildings with multiple rooms. I did the San Simon project to learn more about how people lived in pit structures. At the time, we would have explained the transition using the increasing numbers of people and the increasing amounts of agriculture being practiced. Certainly, both were increasing prior to and during the transition, but it is unclear how these prompted the specific change in architecture. I am now of the opinion that world view and religion may have had a role in the transition, but I cannot demonstrate the exact connections.

During these and other projects, students in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma volunteered to help me with the lab analyses of the artifacts we had collected. Although I had a position in the department by that point, I could not have analyzed all of the material myself. As with avocational archaeologists, student volunteers were crucial to my research. Working in my lab also allowed the students to evaluate whether they wanted to pursue a career in archaeology. While many did not, I hope that they all gained an appreciation for archaeology and how their community contributions helped to shape the understandings of people in the past.

Later, at a small, regional archaeology conference, I once again witnessed the ways that students can elevate the work of professionals. Marc Thompson, one of the presenters, suggested that some Mimbres iconography painted on pottery bowls from southwestern New Mexico was part of the Hero Twins origin saga common in Mesoamerica. Although

I remain grateful to them for their enthusiastic assistance through the heat of May and June in southern Arizona



*Students and avocational volunteers record a site on survey in the San Simon drainage.*

*Scarlet Macaw perched on structure.*

archaeology, and that paper defined the next steps of my career.

Marc, Kristina, and I suggested that the Hero Twins saga came to the Mimbres from the Maya-speaking people in the Huasteca area on the southeast coast of Mexico. Scarlet macaws are present in Mimbres sites at about 1000 CE, the same time that people were painting the Hero Twins on their bowls, and we proposed that people, either Mimbres or Mesoamerican, brought both to the Mimbres at the same time. That is, people from Mimbres went south to get the macaws and received knowledge of the Hero Twins at the same time, or people from the Huasteca went north with both.

Upon further research, we discovered something important: we were wrong! (And this is how science works.) Others were interested in the presence of scarlet macaws in sites in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico (SW/NW). Many of us became part of an informal team to use ancient DNA, radiocarbon dating, and isotope analyses to investigate these macaws – where they were raised, what they were eating, their chronometric dates, and their genetic lineage. A community emerged to answer questions about the past that an individual could never determine on their own.

others had proposed this, it was an “ah-ha” moment for me and for Kristina Wyckoff, one of my Master’s students sitting next to me. We approached Marc, and the three of us decided to research this topic a bit more and write a paper on it.

Once again, a student was fundamental in forming research questions and doing the work. This moment turned my research to a totally different direction that I never would have predicted. It resulted in a paper that the three of us published in American Antiquity, a major journal in North American

The result of this teamwork was discovering that people were probably raising the macaws in the SW/NW, and they maintained a single genetic line through time from about 900-1450 CE and across space from northern New Mexico to northern Chihuahua. The evidence suggests that people were breeding these scarlet macaws hundreds of miles north of their natural habitat, and that they did not go back and forth to Mesoamerica to get macaws.

My career, like most others, has been a series of chance encounters and the happenstance of people I knew. Along the way, avocational archaeologists, students, and other archaeologists have been critical to my research, and of course, I could not have done this without an academic position at the University of Oklahoma. My hope is that the research and knowledge we have produced together will inspire the next generation to make archaeology a space of collaborative passion and contribution.

A community emerged to answer questions about the past that an individual could never determine on their own

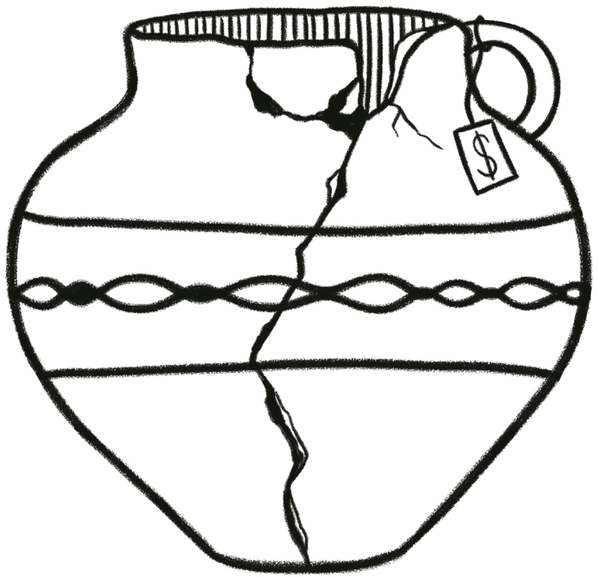
*Avocational crew eating lunch at San Simon Basin.*

**Patricia (Pat) Gilman is Emeritus Faculty in Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma, with over fifty years of archaeological research in the Mimbres region of New Mexico**

# “How Much Can I Sell This For?”

## And Other Questions I’ve Never Actually had a Collector Ask Me

**Lewis Dolmas**



It’s four o’clock in the morning on a Saturday and my alarm is blaring in my ear. I spent over fourteen hours the day before at an excavation, and I’d like nothing more than to hit snooze and go back to sleep, but I don’t. I get up, get dressed, and hit the road for Tahlequah, Oklahoma, three hours away, on the other side of the state.

The characteristically stormy September weather has left the roads completely empty, and I’m able to get into town early enough to stop for coffee before heading across the street to the public library. My two compatriots, Mel Phillips and Ray McAllister, both members of the Oklahoma Anthropological Society, are already there, and we chat for a bit while waiting for the library to open their doors; once they do, we set up for the eight or nine hours of work we have ahead of us. I’ve made the journey to learn from the very best about what some see as a cardinal sin; or as Montpelier Foundation archaeologist Matt Reeves once humorously put it: engaging with “the enemy.” The enemy in question? Artifact collectors.

Archaeologists must get out of their offices and classrooms and go have real, meaningful conversations with these collectors if they want to build working relationships. Learning how to do just that is what inspired me to meet Mel Phillips at the crack of dawn to help with one of his Artifact Identification Days.

An active member of the Oklahoma Anthropological Society (OAS), Phillips has been involved in avocational archaeology since his childhood. From helping with State Survey projects, to volunteering hundreds of site reports (he’s one of the reasons the Survey accepts electronic copies now), to performing his own non-collection survey of Little Skin Bayou River, Phillips has garnered a lot of experience with Oklahoma archaeology and artifacts. As such, he’s often had friends and acquaintances ask for his help with identifying items in their own collections.

*Mel Phillips photographing a collection at the Norman ID Day.*

*(From right to left) Mel Philips talking with collectors Pat James and Dillon Dennis at the Clinton Artifact ID Day.*

In Oklahoma, surface collecting is just about as common as birdwatching, which archaeologists lament, mourning the loss of data and the compromising of sites and the information potential they hold. Certainly, destruction of data does happen. I've worked on plenty of sites which had been totally picked over, or had their features blown through by an overeager backhoe-owner. Despite this misfortune, it's incredibly detrimental for archaeologists to accuse all collectors of this kind of irresponsibility. To the contrary, I would argue that it is much more helpful for all involved to assume the opposite: that collectors are potential allies, not probable enemies.

Why would archaeologists need allies? The National Historic Preservation Act was signed into law in 1966, mandating archaeological surveys for federally funded or permitted projects. In the nearly 60 years since its passage and the resulting explosion of surveys in the form of compliance archaeology, less than a single percentage point of Oklahoma's total land area has seen the well-worn hiking boots of professional archaeologists. With the obvious exception of federally funded projects on private land, most of this surveyed area has been publicly held; ninety-seven percent of land in Oklahoma, however, is privately owned. To put it plainly, archaeologists cannot possibly hope to paint a comprehensive picture of the state's archaeological record themselves. They need help, and thankfully there's a lot of it already out there if they know where to look and have the humility and wisdom to ask.

No one knows the land better than the people who live on it, and in my experience, that's who most collectors in Oklahoma are. Rather than the stereotypical, shady individual, looking to amass objects to sell or to hoard for themselves, many collectors are just people who are interested in the material history of the land they live on, oftentimes in the exact same ways that archaeologists are. I've answered countless calls and emails from curious landowners asking many of the same questions myself or my colleagues would about finds on their property. I haven't answered a single call inquiring how much a find might be worth.

If archaeologists take a break from clutching their pearls over the ever-so-precious data these collectors are "destroying" and have a few conversations with them instead, they might be shocked to find just how much of that data they've actually collected, knowingly or not, as well as just how willing they might be to help make something out of it. As it stands, many professional archaeologists continue to do both collectors and themselves a great disservice by treating the former as a few bent rules away from being a criminal, rather than a few conversations away from being an archaeologist.

The distrust goes both ways. As wonderful as it would be if every collector reached out to us professionals, most do not. Whether it be due to a bad experience with a stuck-up archaeologist, their neighbors warning them that we'll take their land if we find out they've got anything good (we can't, and we really don't want to), or from assuming that professionals wouldn't want to talk with them, many private collectors avoid archaeologists altogether.

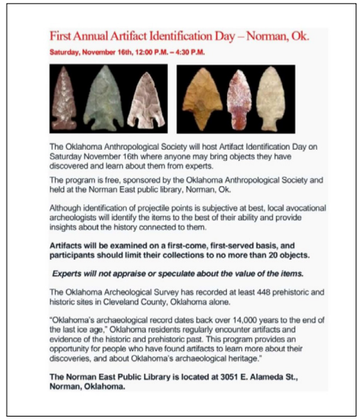
Nearly two years ago, Mel Phillips was sitting in a diner thinking about inquiries from collectors over the years when he was struck with an idea that would help to change that sour relationship between archaeologists and collectors. He got out a napkin, wrote down the names of some Oklahoma towns, and when the waitress came by, he asked her to pick a number, one through twelve. She picked seven—Chickasha, Oklahoma—and the location of the first official OAS Artifact Identification Day was set.


*Mel Phillips's artifact identification system.*

Phillips threw together a flyer and drove out to Chickasha to advertise the event. Two weeks later, he sat in a public library talking with dozens of collectors about the nature of the items in their collections, taking pictures, noting as much provenience data as the owners were willing and able to give him, and sharing his preliminary identifications. In the time since that first event, Phillips has hosted an ID Day in a different town just about every three weeks, sometimes more.

For collectors, these events provide an excellent opportunity to learn more about what they have in their collections; but they also provide

*A collection of projectile points belonging to Pat James, photographed at the Clinton Artifact ID Day.*



First Annual Artifact Identification Day – Norman, Ok.

**Saturday, November 16th, 12:00 P.M. – 4:30 P.M.**

The Oklahoma Anthropological Society will host Artifact Identification Day on Saturday November 16th where anyone may bring objects they have discovered and learn about them from experts.

The program is free, sponsored by the Oklahoma Anthropological Society and held at the Norman East public library, Norman, Ok.

Although identification of projectile points is subjective at best, local avocational archeologists will identify the items to the best of their ability and provide insights about the history connected to them.

**Artifacts will be examined on a first-come, first-served basis, and participants should limit their collections to no more than 20 objects.**

***Experts will not appraise or speculate about the value of the items.***

The Oklahoma Archeological Survey has recorded at least 448 prehistoric and historic sites in Cleveland County, Oklahoma alone.

"Oklahoma's archaeological record dates back over 14,000 years to the end of the last ice age." Oklahoma residents regularly encounter artifacts and evidence of the historic and prehistoric past. This program provides an opportunity for people who have found artifacts to learn more about their discoveries, and about Oklahoma's archaeological heritage."

**The Norman East Public Library is located at 3051 E. Alameda St., Norman, Oklahoma.**

*The poster for a recent artifact ID day in Norman, Oklahoma.*

something more: inspiration. As Travis Caperton, a collector who attended the Norman ID Day, told me, "I've learned much and have been motivated to learn more." When I asked Phillips what he gets out of the events, I was surprised to hear that his answer was similar. I had mostly expected Phillips to speak on the opportunity he gets to document artifacts from around the state which otherwise would never see the flash of a camera or the black and white tiles of a scale card. While he surely did chat about these experiences, Phillips told me that the most joy he gets from doing these Artifact ID Days lies in the intangibles.

"I truly enjoy meeting people that have a common interest in archaeology and admiring what they have found," Phillips said. "Each collector has stories about their finds. I learn something every time I talk with them and look at their collections."

To Phillips, much of the beauty of ID Days lies not just in the artifacts themselves, but in the conversations and relationships they facilitate. One of the most exciting moments in those conversations is when he can tell that someone is going to leave the event and go get on their computer or head to the library and start doing research of their own. These events have a great potential to spark an interest in collectors, one that spurs them to see their collections not just as material things, but as archaeological data and potential sources of knowledge about the past. For many, that change in recognition becomes an itch they can't scratch. It's an itch I'm sure any of the professional archaeologists that may be reading this are familiar with.

Something I've learned from Phillips in helping with OAS's artifact identification days—and something that any archaeologist who wishes to build relationships with collectors would do well to consider—is the importance of reciprocity. Phillips is able to bring so many people to the table because he's not asking for them to share their collections just for the sake of his own quest for knowledge. Instead, he's offering his expertise at no price, expectation, or commitment. He invites people to join him in sharing and producing knowledge together.

All great archaeology starts with a desire to learn, and that desire is something that many collectors have. Treating them as equal collaborators, as Phillips does, helps develop that desire and turn it into a benefit for the entire community. Collectors with the same passion for learning about the past that professional archaeologists have can be extremely valuable friends. They are extra sets of eyes looking for sites, stewards watching after cultural resources, or research partners helping us to learn more about the past, but only if we can find it within ourselves to get down off of our high horses and invite them to collaborate as colleagues, rather than adversaries.

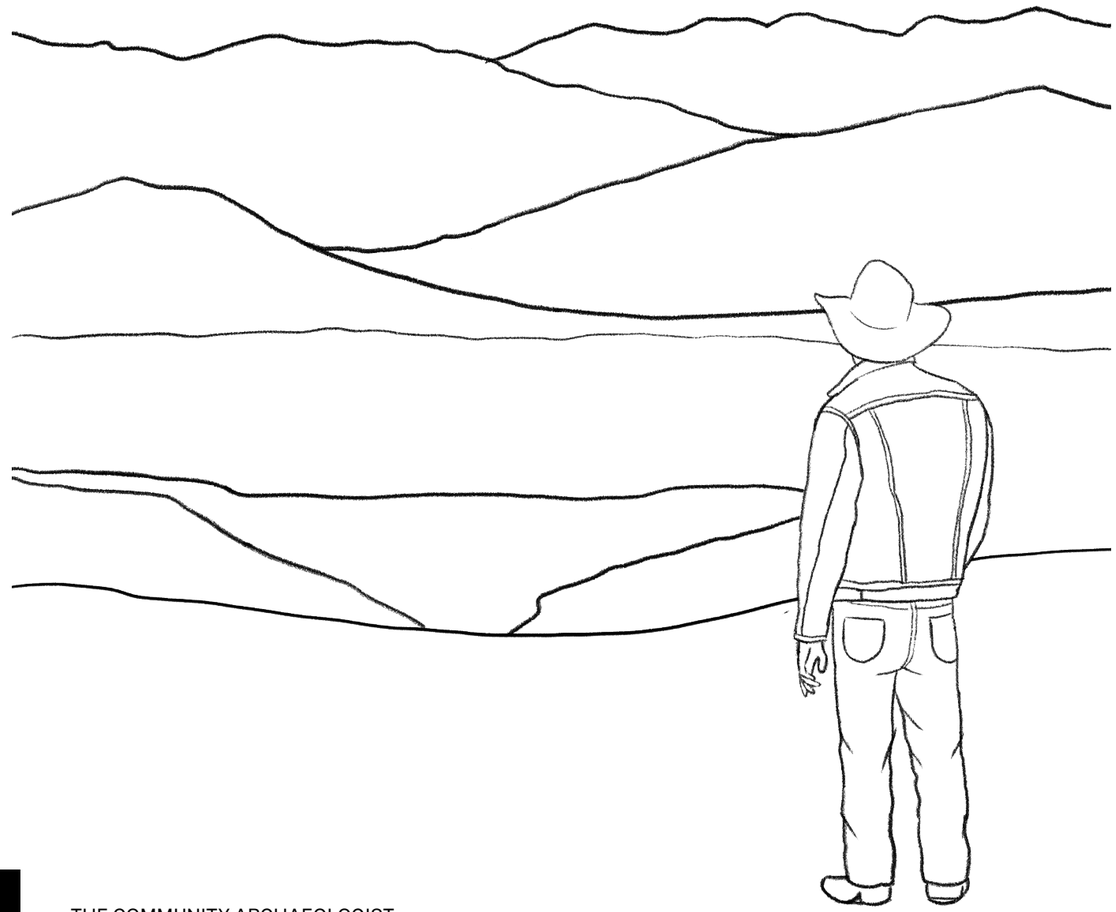
*An example of some of the oddities that can show up at ID days: a sheep's bone apple spoon from the UK.*

**Lewis Dolmas is a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Oklahoma. His work leverages the relationships between archaeologists and artifact collectors.**

# Harnessing Local Knowledge

## Ranching Wisdom in the Upper Gunnison Basin

**Noah Powell**



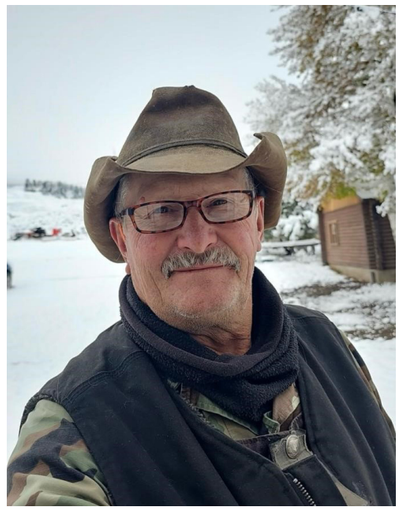


**Ranchers and residents are far from unaware of archaeology—they live alongside it daily.**

Since the 1980s, whispers of mammoth hunters once occupying the Upper Gunnison Basin (UGB), Colorado, have circulated through the archaeological grapevine. Yet, to archaeologists, these rumors were, well, just rumors. Motivated by a fascination with the Ice Age, my master's thesis in archaeology at the University of Oklahoma explores whether mammoth hunters over 12,600 years ago left traces on the UGB landscape. The most enduring evidence of their presence is likely the distinctive "Clovis" stone spear points, dating to 13,400–12,600 years ago. With these artifacts in mind, I traveled deep into the Rocky Mountains to talk to the people most knowledgeable of the UGB landscape: residents and ranchers. I knew from the start that understanding the past isn't just about artifacts—it's about the land and those who know it best.

Ranchers and residents develop deep landscape knowledge through years of experience, observing seasons, wildlife and terrain. These insights can offer clues about how people in the past lived. That's where Leonard Kreuger comes in. Kreuger, a UGB rancher, has spent most of his life in the area and now lives on the ranch that once belonged to his parents. His leathered skin and calloused hands are a testament to his work ethic and relationship with the land, and he regularly wears his felt wide-brim hat, which I unmistakably associate with "Rocky Mountain Rancher." As a lifelong Gunnison rancher, Kreuger carries the kind of deep, generational knowledge that can change how we think about the past.

**"Local knowledge really matters"** said Kreuger. **"Ranchers know the land well, like the weather, terrain, plants, and soil. It's all part of our daily lives."**



*Leonard Kreuger at his ranch in Gunnison, Colorado.*

Kreuger's insight—and that of other locals—proved invaluable to me, not just in terms of artifacts, but in shaping how I interpreted the land and its history.

The UGB is a gorgeous place surrounded by fourteeners—mountain peaks that exceed 14,000 ft above sea level—whose forested sides turn orange and yellow in the Autumn. From these peaks, snow melts and springs transform into meandering, babbling creeks before eventually joining the Gunnison River. During the Ice Age, and still today, it is a hunter's paradise containing many large prey species, including bison (now extinct in the area), moose, deer, and elk, who roam the basin's rolling parklands. With such natural beauty, it's easy to see why people continue to call the UGB home.

Residents and particularly generational ranchers, like Kreuger, have acquired a knowledge of their landscape that archaeologists can only attain through lots of time and money— both of which we lack. Through their daily tasks, experiences of seasons, and many years of engaging with wildlife, the ranchers of the UGB are confronted with landscape decisions similar to those of past hunter-gatherers. Moreover, many ranchers are familiar with the seasonal migrations of deer, elk, big horn sheep, and other prey species. They have established the "best" hunting areas, fishing spots, camping locations, and, most importantly, where it is best to live in the basin. More often than not, the traces of past people at these exact locations vindicate their assessments.

Ranchers and residents are far from unaware of archaeology—they live alongside it daily. When one develops an intense relationship with the land, one starts noticing the



*Looking south at the San Juan Mountain range in the UGB.*

anomalies: oddly shaped rocks made out of unique materials, stones arranged linearly or purposely stacked, bones hanging out of arroyos, the traces of old fire pits, and spear and arrow points lying on the surface. Commonly and understandably, they pick these projectile points up and bring them home to share with friends and family. Over time and generations, some families accumulate thousands of artifacts from their ranches and neighboring locations. These collections are often assembled with care and contain essential clues about the region's past.

This community-based knowledge led me to the breakthrough I had been seeking. Within a few days of viewing collections at different ranches, I verified two Clovis points made of different, yet likely local materials. Found only a few miles apart by two different individuals, these artifacts confirmed what had long been rumored: Ice Age hunter-gatherers occupied the Upper Gunnison Basin some 13,000 years ago. Among the same collections were many projectile points just younger than Clovis, which affirmed a continuous occupation of the UGB since Clovis times.

Yet even these revelations were soon overshadowed by a growing realization: the archaeological and historical knowledge held by residents—particularly lifelong ranchers like Kreuger—was both profound and perilously undocumented. Their insights, shaped by decades of living closely with the land, offered a depth of understanding that is difficult to find through traditional research alone. These weren't just people who happened to live on significant land; they were active participants in its story.

Kreuger's artifact collection and stories illustrate this point perfectly. Spread across the table in his ranch house was a time

capsule of human occupation in the UGB. His collection contained metal arrowheads from the most recent Ute occupation, stone axes, knives, and arrowheads that go back several thousand years. Although not Clovis points, there were multiple spearpoints that dated to the last years of the Ice Age, 11,500 years ago. As I bent over the collection, taking photos and measurements and jotting details in my notes, Kreuger told me stories about these artifacts and his experiences with archaeology and the history of the UGB.

Kreuger had spent considerable time researching the northern branch of the Old Spanish Trail near his ranch. He explained that Indigenous guides (most likely Ute) introduced this trail to the Spanish around the early 18th century. It ran from Santa Fe, New Mexico, through the Cochetopa Pass into the UGB, then west towards Grand Junction and Utah's Green River. Later, American explorers, traders, and even the UGB's namesake, Captain John Gunnison, used the trail to enter the UGB. In part, it is a popular route because it receives far less snow than other UGB mountain passes, keeping it accessible through much of the winter.

However, as Kreuger explained, once the trail got to the UGB, it forked off in different ways throughout the valley. One fork, called the "1874 Toll Road," went west to the high-elevation town of Lake City. With no historical map available, Kreuger set out to locate the route himself. He spent hours off-roading and navigating poorly maintained dirt roads, relying on his knowledge of the UGB landscape to follow the most geographically plausible path.

Kreuger finally had a stroke of luck. He met a group of Ute tribal members passing by the ranch on their way to reconnect with their ancestral homeland. As they chatted, Kreuger shared his investigations into the Old Spanish Trail and the 1874 Toll Road. In a remarkable coincidence, a Ute individual produced a copy of one of the few surviving maps from the nineteenth century and presented it to Kreuger, confirming his hypothesis exactly. He had traced the correct route all along, a testament to the rancher's intuition.


*Map of the Old Spanish Trail (Washington County Historical Society).*



**"We all learned a bunch that day, the Ute, as well as us," said Kreuger. "In fact, meeting with them was one of the neatest days of my life."**


*Clovis projectile points observed in private collections.*

Kreuger's wisdom was foundational to the success of my archaeological projects in the UGB. After all, where were those Clovis points found? One was found at the mouth of the North Cochetopa Pass, and the other was found only a few miles away. Could the Clovis people who left their point at the mouth of the pass have used a route similar to the Old Spanish Trail to get to and from the UGB? It's possible. The trail was first introduced to the Spanish explorers by Indigenous guides, likely of Ute affiliation, who undoubtedly learned the route through generational knowledge passed down by their ancestors, preserving the optimal way to get to and from prime hunting grounds in the Cochetopa hills, especially during the winter. Without Kreuger, this connection may never have occurred to me.

This is just one example of how interactions with ranchers and residents changed my interpretations of and position toward the archaeological record I was engaging with. It made me realize that good archaeology is not possible without the knowledge of folks like Kreuger. Their firsthand landscape experience can be more insightful than interpretations drawn only from the archaeological record. These perspectives can only make a difference if they are shared, which means that to represent the past, archaeologists must engage with the present wisdom of locals.

**Noah Powell is a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Oklahoma whose research focuses on the earliest human use of the Upper Gunnison Basin in Colorado.**

# A Conversation With
# Robert Pickering

*Robert Pickering.*

*TCA* recently sat down with Dr. Robert B. Pickering, R.M. and Ida McFarlin Dean of Library and Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Tulsa. Pickering has just released his new book: *Luck is a Fortune: Adventure, Duty, and Buffalo on the 1841 Frontier*. Read our interview below to learn about what inspired Pickering and what exciting projects he has up his sleeve next.

To read *Luck Is a Fortune*, head to okhistory.org to order your copy.



*Miracle, a white bison.*

**TCA: What inspired you to write this book?**

**RP:** For at least 30 years, I've been interested in buffalo and buffalo culture. When I was at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science back in the 90s, we were looking around for an exhibit topic that would include all the academic areas that the museum represented: archaeology, anthropology, zoology, paleontology, etc. We settled on bison, and I'll interchange bison with buffalo—they're the same. About that time, a small white buffalo calf was born in Janesville, Wisconsin, of all places, and it turns out that the headquarters of the National Bison Association was about a five-minute drive from the museum. So, I started talking to the folks at the NBA when the news release came out about the white buffalo. I said, "You know this is really a big deal; you should send someone out there to do an interview." The NBA Director at the time said, "well, I don't have anyone to send. If I pay for your fare will you go?" So, I flew to Janesville and I interviewed the owners and took photos, and ended up writing a couple of articles on white buffalo—what's their spiritual significance in Indian Country? How do you get a white buffalo? How do they even exist? From that, I did a book on white buffalo, and I just have found bison to be

one of the most amazing critters in North America, and, to some extent, the treatment of buffalo has paralleled American thought about the development of nature. In that way, they're sort of a bellwether for how Americans interact with the environment. When I came out here to Tulsa and the Gilcrease, which has great archaeology and art and archival collections, the librarian at the time brought me a little diary about six inches tall and written in soft lead pencil and she said "you might be interested in this, it's about a buffalo hunt along the Canadian River." And I thought, alright, I'll transcribe that and write an article, and that will be the end of that. Well, so much for that thought. It turns out that these are young officers from Fort Gibson who go out on a buffalo hunt. Mark Carlson, who is the Director of Special Collections here at McFarland Library, said, "we also have a Fort Gibson diary from the same time." So, he produced a handwritten manuscript, actually a reminiscence, by a Private of Dragoons whose name was Fynn. So here are—what are the chances—two diaries of two guys who are at the same time, same place, with totally different stories and backgrounds. That's what got me started on doing the book.

**TCA: We get to know the characters Hammond and Fynn in your book from their diaries. What do you think makes them relatable and interesting to modern readers?**

**RP:** Well, certainly for Hammond, the title of the book itself, Luck is a Fortune, talks about that in terms of the hunt. They're using flintlock pistols on horseback, I can't imagine very much that's less efficient than that; you might as well throw rocks. So, it's not easy for him, and he's inexperienced at hunting buffalo. You also have the complicating factor that the horses don't like buffalo all that well. But what I found after reading his diary and doing some research on what happened to Hammond after Fort Gibson, 'luck is a fortune' really is a metaphor for his entire life. I'm pretty sure he contracted malaria when he was deployed to Florida during the Seminole Wars. He sort of alternates between time in service and long rest periods at Red Cliff Plantation. His father named him after a Roman consul with the expectation that he would be a prominent military leader, but his health kept him back. He was a general in the Civil War, but he was a desk general; he was not a line commander. It affected his entire life, and I think it affected his outlook. Reading the letters that he wrote in the 1870s back to Rachel Huey, clearly, he has some regrets. In one of his letters, he signs it "I'm worth nothing, I am nothing, but didn't we have some good times." It humanizes the story. So, he's looking back as old people do and is reflecting on his life and people he knew, and are they still alive, and it's really an interesting commentary on life at the time.

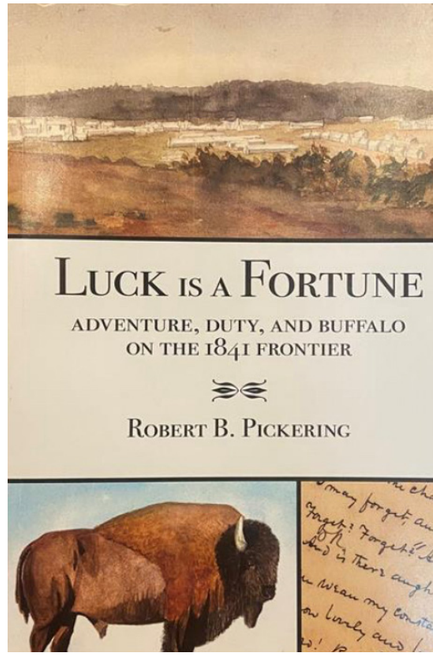
*Illustrations by Amber L. DuBoise-Shepherd.*

**TCA: As your readers learn about the hunt and these two men, what would you say is the number one thing you would want to leave your readers with?**

**RP:** I think a part of it is Fynn. Trying to research a John Fynn, an Irish immigrant in New York in the 1840s—good luck with that. I tried to search him on ancestry.com and other things, but he kind of disappears. Now, clearly, he went back east; my assumption is that he returned to New York. Now what did he do? As I say in the book, by 1840, the Industrial Revolution had already killed the custom hat and clothing trade, so that was not really an option open to him. He had some military experience, clearly from his reminiscence, he was a good writer, and he edited the manuscript that we have here. My sense is that possibly he was preparing it for a book, which, at least so far, I haven't found. So here are people who were 1. on purpose and 2. maybe in desperation, were trying to figure out how to navigate hard times or how to get ahead. Certainly, in Hammond's case, it was how do you get ahead? How do you become a senior officer? You pretty much have to be on the front line. That is how you get advancement, is through service. In Fynn's case, it's very different. The Army is kind of a lifeline as it was to many immigrants at that time. It might surprise modern readers to know what percentage of the Army were immigrants at that time, and many of them did not speak English. It was not their first language, so imagine that difficulty for officers and how they did what they did. What I hope to do is personalize these stories. These are people who went through all the daily hardships and daily joys that we go through today, and in some sense, they're not that different from ourselves. The other piece of it is, how do you read history? Is everything that was written down 100 years ago equally true? The answer is no.

**TCA: What projects are you currently working on?**

**RP:** I am using Hammond's diary as a framework for creating a novel. I've never done that before. At my stage in the game, the question is: can I write an interesting story that people might want to read? So, I'm using Hammond's diary to say, ok, here's the timeline, here's the events. Who would have been there? What would the impediments have been and how would they have overcome them? An editor friend told me once that when he's writing fiction, he puts a note on his screen that says: It only gets worse. In any action movie that you see, that writer had that same Post-it. I'm trying to do that. 99% of my work has been nonfiction, so trying to write fiction and then let go a little bit is the personal challenge. But that's also what makes it fun.




*Cover of Luck Is a Fortune.*

# ROOTS IN THE ROCKIES

Image by Noah Powell
*Adventuring down a two-track in the north Cochetopa Hills, looking northeast towards Gunnison.*

The mountains of Colorado have inspired humans since time immemorial, including us folks here at *The Community Archaeologist*. These majestic landscapes, like The Gunnison River Valley and the San Juan range of the Rockies, have played an important role in the personal and professional lives of our Executive Director Dr. Bonnie Pitblado, our Editor Chelsy Lyons, and this issue's contributing writer Noah Powell. This special photo feature highlights some of the memories and the beauty that these mountains have brought into our lives. We hope you enjoy this glimpse into a land that has been a magical common thread between our staff and the humans who came before us.

Top image by Noah Powell
*View of the Blue Mesa Reservoir from the 5GN1 lithic quarry.*

Bottom image by Dr. Bonnie Pitblado
*OU Field School students Noah Place (left) and Cody Webster (right) prepare to record a very high altitude (10,000' elevation) archaeological site in the Powderhorn Basin Wilderness Area, Colorado. Noah earned an MA in Anthropology at the University of Arizona, where he is now pursuing a PhD. Cody is an archaeologist with Algonquin Consultants, Miami, Oklahoma.*



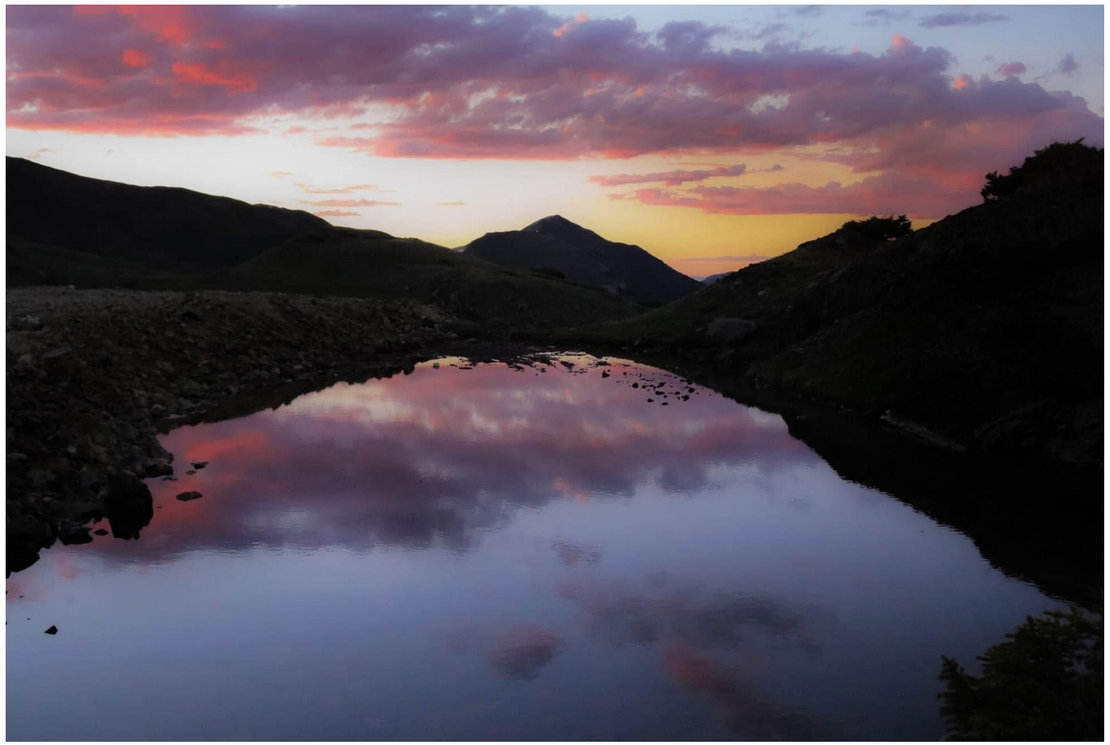


Image by Chelsy Lyons
*Sunset near Imogene Pass.*

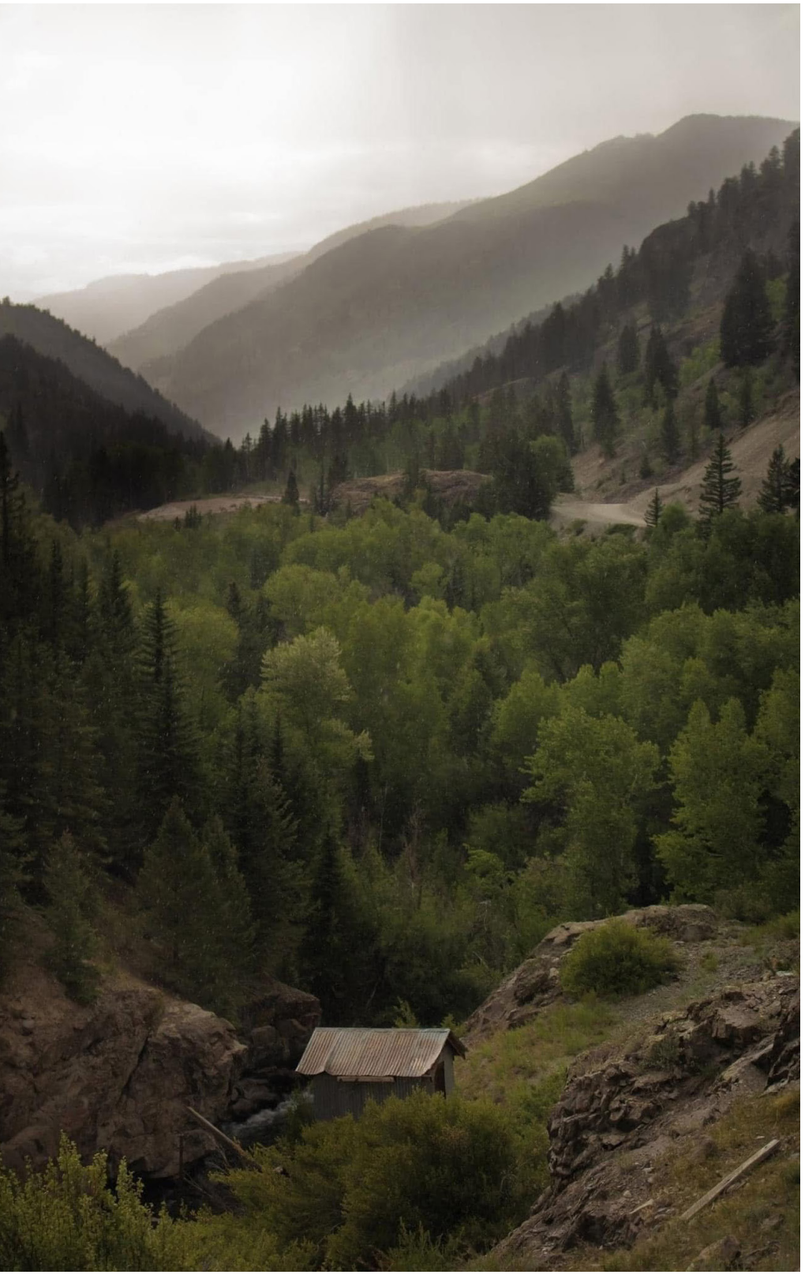


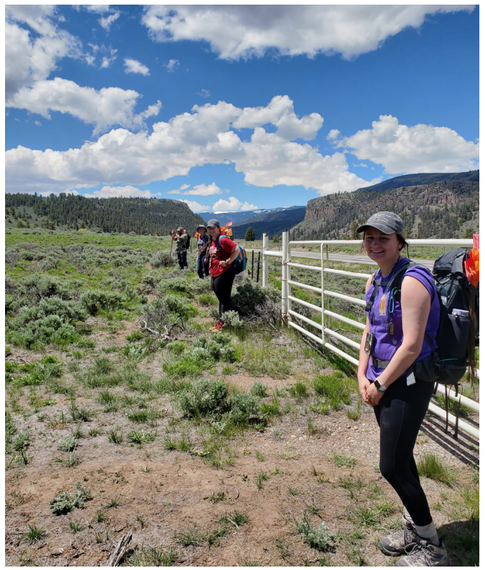
Image by Chelsy Lyons
*A summertime valley in the San Juan Mountains, Near Ouray, Colorado.*

Top image by Chelsy Lyons
*A mountain lake on the Alpine Loop in the San Juan range.*


Bottom image by Dr. Bonnie Pitblado
*OU Field School students teach young visitors about flint knapping at "Archaeology in the Park," a public outreach event sponsored by OU in Lake City, Colorado, in July 2019.*

Top image by Noah Powell
*Sunrise over the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River at the Gate Campground.*

Bottom image by Dr. Bonnie Pitblado
*OU Field School students prepare to conduct an archaeological survey of a landscape on a terrace of the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River, June 2019. Surveys in this area revealed many surface finds of projectile points and other chipped stone artifacts, some as old as about 9,000 years.*





Top image by Noah Powell
*Looking south at the Lake Fork Valley.*

Bottom image by Dr. Bonnie Pitblado
*OU Field School students Riza McClurkin (left) and Ella Crenshaw (right) learn to excavate at a site in the Lake Fork Valley, June 2019. After graduating from OU, Riza earned an MA in Anthropology at the University of Montana and now works as an archaeologist for Algonquin Consultants, a cultural resource management firm based in Miami, Oklahoma. Ella is about to complete an MA in Anthropology at OU and, after several years as the Ethnology Collections Manager at the Sam Noble Museum of Oklahoma Natural History, recently accepted a position as Tribal Liaison for the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.*

## Write for Us!

We are looking for writers to deepen our readers' understanding of the human experience through ideas that are grounded in or related to archaeology and heritage. Help us demonstrate the value of anthropological knowledge in the wider world. If you would like to write for *The Community Archaeologist*, email us at thecommunityarchaeologist@gmail.com. Please follow us on social media or visit our website!

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