



LAS November 2012 Headlines:

**Officials: Ancient bison bone bed “destroyed”**

John S. Adams, USA TODAY, October 19, 2012

A team of archaeological investigators, anthropologists and Crow tribal officials today are headed to the site of a 2,000-year-old bison kill site that was unearthed last summer as part of Westmoreland Resources Inc.'s plans to expand its Absaloka Coal Mine.

The site, known as the Sarpy Creek Bison Kill site, was first discovered during a resource identification effort required under the National Historic Preservation Act for the company to expand the mine.



A pile of ancient bison bones from a prehistoric burial site on the Crow Indian Reservation sits exposed after being dug up by a backhoe. (Photo: Great Falls Tribune)

The largest bison bone bed was estimated to cover almost 3,000 square meters and contained the remains of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of butchered bison remains and prehistoric spear points dating back to the Late Archaic period, Utah State University anthropologist Judson Finley said.

Finley, director of the field school at Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, has over the years worked with the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribes on archaeological preservation. Finley said the site unearthed at the Absaloka Mine site is a significant archaeological find on par with the Head-

Smashed-In Buffalo Jump World Heritage Site in Alberta, and should have been painstakingly excavated by expert archaeologists over the course of three to five years.

"All of these remains are highly butchered bison remains that are beautifully preserved and extremely rare," said Finley, who will be among the team headed to the site today to examine the extent of damage. "This site was full of information about the way people used to live 2,000 years ago."

Finley said if the site had been properly preserved and carefully excavated, it likely would have qualified for designation under National Register of Historic Places or as a UNESCO World Heritage site.



## Loveland Archaeological Society, Inc.

A Colorado Non-Profit Corporation

Calls to Westmoreland's corporate office were directed to the Montana mine office, and mine officials there did not return a message seeking comment Thursday.

According to Crow Tribe cultural director Burton Pretty On Top, officials for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the federal Office of Surface Mining and GCM Services, a private consultant hired by Westmoreland, all signed off on data recovery plan last year, which led to the extensive excavation of the site in late summer 2011.

Finley called the data recovery plan, which was written by GCM Service's owner Gene Munson, a joke.

"I can say with certainty that data recovery plan that was approved to excavate that site would have never been approved by any state historic preservation office," Finley said.

According to Pretty on Top and Finley, rather than go through a lengthy and expensive data recovery process at the site—which is what would have been required on public land -- GCM Services excavated the site in 2-meter squares with a backhoe and power screen to separate the spear points and bones from the dirt.

The bison bones are now piled several feet high and remain exposed next to the holes they were dug out of, Finley said.

"Basically what we have right now is this big hole that is roughly the size of an Olympic swimming pool where there once was a really beautiful bison bone bed, and sitting next to that is a giant pile of extremely valuable butchered bison remains just laying out on the ground in the middle of nowhere, exposed to the weather with cows stomping around on them," Finley said.

Pretty On Top and assistant Crow cultural director Richard White said GCM Services went forward with an extensive excavation of the site without notifying tribal elders and other tribal officials. Pretty On Top said the former director of the Crow Tribal Historic Preservation Office, Dale Old Horn, was the only tribal official who knew about the plan and approved it without notifying tribal leaders.

Pretty On Top said excavation of the site violated the Apsaalooke Tribe Cultural Resource Protection Act of 2005.

"Permission was granted by Dale Old Horn by himself without telling the tribal chairman, without telling the cultural committee, and without telling the cultural director," Pretty On Top said.

Old Horn could not be reached for comment and Munson did not return a phone call to his office late Thursday afternoon.

Finley said notes from a July 16, 2010, meeting showed that the people who made the decision to approve the backhoe excavation plan were only considering a "balance between costs and data recovery," and appeared to give no thought to site preservation and avoidance.

"What should have been the major topic of discussion was, 'How can we avoid this site, and if we can't avoid it, how can we do something extremely valuable with it?'" Finley said.

"In my opinion, this happened because the coal company thought they could get away with a shortened compliance process that wasn't going to cost them as much money," Finley added. "I think plain and simple it was an issue of money."

*Adams also writes for the Great Falls Tribune.*

(A special thanks to Richard Sechrist for bringing this article to my attention!)



## **OU archaeologists finish bison kill site excavation**

by Paighen Harkins | The Oklahoma Daily, August 30, 2012

This summer, a team of OU archeologists finished excavating a bison kill site that hadn't been touched by humans in thousands of years.

The site was last visited by humans in the Folsom Age — which was more than 10,000 years ago, said K.C. Carlson, field director of the excavation.

The team found the skeletal remains of more than a dozen bison, some Folsom points — weapons used to kill bison — and some of the butchering tools Paleoindians used to cut up the animals, OU archeologist Leland Bement said.

“The last people to see [the bones] were the ones butchering the bison,” Carlson said.

The Badger Hole kill site excavation was a continuation of the OU Archeological Survey's project to excavate a number of bison kill sites along the Beaver River in Northwest Oklahoma, Carlson said.

This was the second year the team had been excavating the site, so they knew what to expect when they were digging around in the sticky red dirt, but that didn't take away from the excitement of finding something, she said.

“[Finding remains] is a cool feeling,” she said. “It's always neat to see butcher marks because that's the human element of the kills.”

The exact number of remains and artifacts that were found is undetermined at this time because the team is still analyzing its findings, Bement said.

In June the team also was joined by a group of students from the nearby town of Woodward, Okla., who were participating in the Time Team America field school, Bement said.

The students were led through the bone beds in the kill site and made their own spear points, according to the Time Team America website.

As part of the field school, OU's team butchered a bison using the primitive, stone tools the Paleoindians would have used, Carlson said.

Having that hands-on experience helped Carlson understand more of what she was seeing when she was examining butcher marks.

“[Butchering the bison] was a really neat experience because we spend so much time in the lab looking at these butcher marks,” she said. “To really make sense of those was really cool.”

Members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes who donated the bison to the team helped butcher the bison, Carlson said.

The sites the team have excavated date back to right after the extinction of the mammoth at the end of the last ice age, Bement said they are important because they highlight the development of the Paleoindians' hunting strategies, which stuck with them for the next 10,000 years.

“Bison behave a lot differently than mammoths do. [Paleoindians] had to hone their style of hunting,” Bement said.

The Paleoindians developed a hunting strategy where they chased a herd of bison into a dead end gully. From there, the Paleoindians would kill and butcher the bison, Bement said.

The team is finished with excavating the Badger Hole site for now, but they will continue to monitor the area for any new discoveries that are made, Carlson said.



## LAS Find of the Month, November 2012:

Members can bring an artifact to be entered into the competition at the monthly meeting, which will be judged based on the following rules:

1. Must be a member of LAS in good standing.
2. The artifact must be a personal find.
3. It must have been found within the specified time frame, i.e., within the month prior to the meeting.
4. The artifact doesn't have to be a Colorado find—all that matters is that it was found in the last month.

The Find of the Month for November 2012 was made by Pam Whelden.

Type: McKean Blade

Material: Petrified Wood

Location: Adams County, Colorado



## LAS News and Upcoming Events:

- Annual Elections**      If you have nominations for LAS officer elections please bring your suggestions to the next meeting. The elections will be held at the beginning of the **December meeting** on December 4, 2012.
- Speakers Needed!**      We need speakers for our monthly meetings starting in January 2013. If you would like to give a presentation or know of someone who would give a great program please contact Andy Coca, Jean Steinhoff or Kevin Zeeck. No experience is necessary. All that is needed is a passion for our hobby and a willingness to share that passion. Thanks!
- December 4, 2012**      December meeting. This will be our annual Christmas party. Bring a dish to share for the annual feast. If you'd like to bring a Christmas beverage (non-alcoholic please) feel free to do so. Also, we will be taking donations in the form of gifts, gift cards, or money to provide a Christmas for Native American families in the area. If you can't attend and would like to make a donation please contact Sharon Lundt at (970) 669-2375. Annual LAS officer elections will be held at the beginning of the December meeting.