



LAS October 2013 Headlines:

'At the Trowel's Edge of Discovery': ISU archaeology field school makes significant finds in the Sawtooth National Forest

Idaho State University, July 2, 2013

The easy part was finding artifacts; the hard part was digging so deep.

"Exciting things happened right away," said David Peterson, Idaho State University assistant professor of anthropology, research scientist and director of the 2013 ISU Archaeology Field School. "Within 10 minutes at the first site we examined, we found three arrowheads that we could identify by their type, the first identifiable points ever found at the site."

The group's adopted, semi-tongue-in-cheek slogan provided by Peterson was "at the trowel's edge of discovery." But Peterson, a veteran of numerous archaeological digs and other research in North America and as far away as Kazakhstan in Central Asia, was not prepared for how many artifacts his archaeologists in training would find on the edge of their trowels.

"I've never been on a testing project where we've dug this deep before," Peterson said. "Generally you dig down to a level that shows no previous occupation, maybe 3 feet or so, and it ends there. It seemed like the deeper we went, the more we found so we kept on going. Usually in archaeological testing you're lucky if you find something 10 percent of the time, but we've found things throughout the field school."

For four weeks this summer the field school's 10 ISU undergraduate and two master's-level students kept finding artifacts while they dug deeper, meticulously sifting and searching through piles of dirt in the Sawtooth National Forest southwest of Rockland in the Sublett Mountains, about an hour and 15 minute drive from Pocatello.

The students found the first three arrowhead points while doing a preliminary survey of the three sites they were directed to by Sawtooth National Forest archaeologist Brett Guisto. Those obsidian arrowheads were identified as Rose Spring points, which can be as old as 300 A.D. Others they found are probably much older.

The discoveries kept coming, some almost jumping out at the students.

"One day I was giving a demonstration on how to dig efficiently with a trowel," Peterson said. "I was saying 'here's how you do it' and while I was demonstrating, an Elko (a projectile point made of chalcedony of a type that can be hundreds, even thousands of years old) popped up like a coin being flipped from the edge of the trowel."

Other finds included varieties of obsidian and stone projectile points of types ranging from 400 to 6,000 years old, a knife or dart point made from petrified wood, obsidian and stone tools such as knives and scrapers, and ancient debris such as animal bones, some of which showed marks from being worked on with stone tools. Curiously, no ancient ceramics were encountered, which may mean that the site was host to many temporary camps over hundreds or even thousands of years, rather than permanent villages. More recent items included barbed wire, rivets and glazed ceramics. The crew also collected charcoal and bone samples that will be used to date the artifacts by using accelerator mass spectrometry, a method of radiocarbon dating.



David Peterson, ISU assistant professor of anthropology, with some points found by the field school.



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"It's like fishing," said student Matt Shugert. "Sometimes you catch some and sometimes you don't. But overall we did pretty well."

The site, named Sublett Troughs, was the lowest of three sites that Guisto showed the ISU group. Peterson had planned to work at Sublett Troughs for a week or two, then to move up the mountain to the two other sites the group initially surveyed. The Sublett Troughs site was so rich, however, that the group never left, carefully digging two legally-defined 1-meter (3.2-feet-)wide by 2-meter-(6.4-feet-)long "test pits" in 10-centimeter levels. Test pit No. 1 reached a depth of more than 6 feet; No. 2 was nearly 5 feet deep.

The site is located near a spring at an intermediate elevation and was obviously well used by ancient Native Americans. The site is also located along the California Trail, which thousands of emigrants to the West traveled on in the 1800s. The Sublett Troughs site that the ISU students and professor surveyed has the potential of being officially designated as a protected site on the National Register of Historic Places.

Peterson said teaching site protection and conservation is a key element of the class.

"One of my objectives is to get the students trained and familiar with methods of Cultural Resource Management that are practiced by government agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, and private companies, that can help them get jobs in the future," Peterson said. "We emphasized conservation and preservation of the site, and the artifacts we collected, rather than full-blown excavation that is most often part of research rather than site protection."

Students were taught how to do initial surveys of sites by walking them and completing transects, to map using GPS equipment, to perform subsurface testing, and how to excavate, as well as proper methods of field collection and labeling of artifacts and radiocarbon samples.

"The best part of the class was just getting the hands-on experience," Shugert said. "It's one thing reading about it, it's another thing doing it. The overall experience was great. The high point for me was finding a point at a depth of about 160 centimeters (a little over 5 feet)."

The field school's archaeological sites invite further study. "Potentially, there could be years and years of research at these spring sites," Peterson said.



Amy Coughlin, bottom, and Jeff Castro excavate one of the test pits. (ISU Photographic Services)

We Appreciate You!

A special "**THANK YOU**" goes out to all those who assisted with the 2013 Loveland Stone Age Fair from September 27th through September 29th. This list is not all-inclusive, but we'd like to thank the following members for their time and effort, and for those who displayed at the Fair: Mark Boswell, Jan Battaglia, Keith Anderson, Steve Campbell, Shane Skutvik, Greg Oehmen, Jeanne Stewart, Shelline Hettinger, Carol Ekhoft, Rick Miller, Jan Vallentine, Karla Kampbell, Bryan Morgan, Dean Pennell, Mike Pearce, Larry Pachner, Todd Davis, Jim and Joyce Mountain, Karen Swanson, Joe Mosier, Norman Olsen, Mike Oliver, McKella Walsh, Mike Burch, Andy Coca, Sharon Lundt, Jean Steinhoff, Janet Wagner, Gary and Sue Yeager, and Rich Savino.

And of course we can't overlook the contributions and dedication of our 2013 Stone Age Fair Committee: Mike Burch, Andy Coca, Sharon Lundt, Rich Savino, Jean Steinhoff, Janet Wagner, Gary and Sue Yeager, and Kevin Zeeck.

Thank you for helping us make this year's Stone Age Fair another great success!

- Sponsor of the Annual Loveland Stone Age Fair -

www.stoneagefair.com



Find of the Month Recap, October 2012 – September 2013



November 2012
Pam Whelden



December 2012
Shane Skutvik

There was no Find of the Month for October 2012, and no meeting was held in January 2013.



February 2013
Alvin Plucker



March 2013
Alvin Plucker



April 2013
Brian Waggoner



May 2012
Steve Campbell



June 2013
Kevin Zeeck



July 2013
Andy Coca



August 2013
Shane Skutvik



September 2013
Steve Campbell



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LAS Find of the Month, October 2013:

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 October 2013 was made by Robin Guthrie.

Type: Pelican Lake (broken)

Material: Porcelainite

Location: Adams County, Colorado



LAS News and Upcoming Events:

- October 17-19, 2013 Paleoamerican Odyssey in Santa Fe, New Mexico. For more information see the website at <http://www.paleoamericanodyssey.com>. You'll hear all the experts on paleoindian history in the Americas, and the collection of Clovis and other paleo artifacts is being billed as a "once-in-a-decade" display. Our very own Tom Westfall and Rick Miller will be presenting.
- November 5, 2013 November meeting. This will be our annual Native American Foods program. This year Jan Iron and her family have volunteered to provide the main course and will likely perform Native American dances. 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. We will also vote on the October 2012 to September 2013 Find of the Year, so look over the finds on page 4 and be ready to cast your vote!
- December 3, 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.