Jane A. Waldbaum Field School Scholarship Report

By Jonathan Rocha

In the summer of 2014 I participated in the UTEP Archeology Field School under the direction of Dr. David Carmichael. We conducted our field school in two different locations in the Trans-Pecos region of West Texas, the Tigua’s Chilicote Ranch and the Indio Mountain Research Station (IMRS). We spent the first four weeks conducting surface surveys at Chilicote Ranch and the following two weeks touring previously identified sites at the Indio Mountain Research Station.

Chilicote Ranch

The Chilicote Ranch is owned by the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. The ranch is located in both Jefferson Davis and Presidio County in the state of Texas. It measures over 70,000 acres. The property serves as a working cattle ranch, as well as a hunting and recreational area for tribal members.

They have experienced several wildfires in the recent years. Due to this, they have recently completed several plant and wildlife surveys in the ranch. To add to this continuing resource management, they have asked the University of Texas at El Paso to initiate archaeological survey. Several tribal members have taken courses at UTEP, and their positive experience has provided impetus for further engagement with the University. As part of this new community partnership with the Pueblo, the UTEP Archaeology Program performed the first systematic archaeological study of the property.

Our survey results will assist them in avoiding sensitive sites as they rebuild infrastructure, such as water lines damaged from range fires. The survey design is focused on several areas and landforms that were identified as of special concern to the Pueblo. These include cuestas, pastures, guided hunting areas, and caves.

Project Setting

The ranch is situated within the Chihuahuan Desert of the United States. The terrain in the area is dominated by the Sierra Vieja Mountains, outlining cuestas, alluvial fans and fluvial plains. The stone tool raw material present in these areas include: tuffs, rhyolites, and chalcedony. Vegetation is mostly creosote bush, mesquite, ocotillo, acacia, yucca, sotol, prickly pear, lechugilla, and agave.

Field Work

Our daily activities were consistent throughout each week. Our class of twelve students worked Monday through Friday from approximately 0800 to 1400. Before our hike to the sites we packed all the gear we needed, of which included: measuring tape, flagging tape, pin flags, rebars and tags, compasses, water, GPS receivers, and SUNSCREEN. We spent on average six hours out in the field: walking transects, recording, sketching, photographing, and transecting some more. The discovery of sites and artifacts made the scorching heat of West Texas tolerable.
We headed back to HQ around 1400. During lunch, we exchanged stories and shared our findings. A day never went by that we did not find something spectacular. In the evening, we worked on field notes, artifact forms, and site forms. To complement our fieldwork, we were assigned readings of the area’s archaeology, history, and floral/faunal makeup. My professor always says that ten percent of archaeology is done out in the field and the ninety percent in the lab and library.

The class was divided into three crews. Each crew was assigned a different study area on the ranch. Our crew was tasked to walk transects on one of the more prominent cuestas and several portions of the plains. We recorded 15 sites: ranging from lithic scatters, to fire-cracked rock features, and rock structures. The varying landforms we transected yielded many different features.

The highlight of my trip was meeting members of the tribal council. I had the benefit of meeting the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and the War Captain. Our partnership with the Pueblo this summer was a mutual learning experience. My classmates and I were fortunate to learn ethnobotany from the Pueblo. In return, we shared with them, our knowledge of archaeological sites. Going forward, the documentation and interpretation of the archeological sites will contribute to the cultural heritage management activities being undertaken by the Pueblo.

On weekends we visited surrounding towns and went on field trips. During the second week we were invited to visit a Paleoindian site that was being excavated by researchers of Sul Ross University. It was here, that I witnessed my first archaeological excavation. I was very much surprised at how meticulous the work is.

**IMRS**

After our four-week project at Chilicote Ranch, we shifted our studies to the Indio Mountains. The property of the Indio Mountain Research Station came to the possession of the University in 1937. Since then, the property size has increased to 39,518 acres. For a long time, the IMRS was strictly used by the biological and geological sciences, but by 1994 archaeological studies had begun on the property. Our activities here entailed revisiting known sites. Doing so, we learned a great deal about the archaeological variability of the Trans-Pecos region.

We spent a considerable time studying lithic technology by flintknapping. The sequence of lithic reduction and stages of bifacial manufacturing became more apparent as we began chipping stone. My understanding of flake attributes and artifact typologies increased as we experimented in replicating the artifacts we recovered at Chilicote Ranch. Thus, we used obsidian to knapp. The raw material was easy to knapp, but unfortunately its sharp edges led to many bandages. Seeing the progress of my work and the finished projectile points made the bleeding well worth it.
Conclusions

This summer I learned a great deal about our intricate discipline: everything from basic land navigation and note taking skills, to site and artifact analysis and interpretation. Altogether my class recorded over 90 sites in just four weeks. I hope our research will provide additional insights into the Trans-Pecos region. From this experience, I am now convinced this is the career path I want to follow.

I owe my sincere gratitude to the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship for granting me the opportunity to study and research the archaeology of my region and allowing me to explore my academic interests. I also greatly appreciate the hospitality and kindness the Pueblo displayed towards us.

Photos:

Landscape of the Chilicote Ranch
My first projectile point

(Ventral side)  (Dorsal side)

The Crew