

Getting an edge with education and experience

While not as exciting as the adventures of Indiana Jones, UNLV's Summer Field School in Prehistoric Archaeology provides usable experience for today's aspiring archaeologists

PART 1 OF 3

BY JAN WILLIAMS
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"I'm sorry Mr. Jones," said the Human Resource representative as she handed back his resume and cover letter. "Your education is adequate, but you have no job experience."

Can you imagine going through four to five years of scholastic hell only to have someone tell you that the \$30,000-plus education you just finished isn't enough?

Well, there is something you can do about it. Hands-on classes, workshops and internships are available to any student who wants an edge on the job market.

This three-part series will focus on students who sought out these avenues, how they found the forum, what the opportunity entailed and illustrate how a learning situation can translate education into experience.

In part one, Features Editor Jan Williams gives a first person account of her experience on a summer archaeological dig in Hurricane, Utah.

I have always been fascinated with archaeology. When I decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in the field, I began to look for avenues to get hands-on experience that would help me gain employment upon graduation.

After gathering reference material, I discovered ANT 488, "Field Methods in Prehistoric Archaeology" was offered as a six-credit course during Summer Session III through UNLV's Continuing Education program. In addition to money received from tuition, the excavation was co-sponsored by the Desert Research Institute and the Department of Energy.

Paul Buck, assistant research professor at DRI, served as director of the project. He explained we would be excavating an Anasazi Indian site in Hurricane (pronounced Hur-ri-kun by the locals), Utah that was about to be bulldozed for a brand new housing development.

Buck hired Sally Billings, Lauren Perry and Jeff Wedding, graduate students from

UNLV's Department of Anthropology to assist students on the dig.

Once we arrived in St. George, 18 miles from Hurricane and the location of our housing and lecture sites, the experience-gathering quest began.

Buck gave our crew of 10, including UNLV graduate student Shari Marks and undergraduates Wendy Andrejack and myself, an introductory lecture on what we could expect to find.

"We teach people the basics of how to recognize something that people have made, all the contexts of different kinds of things—pottery, chipped stone, grinding stones, organic kinds of artifacts," Buck explained. Artifacts he expected us to find were pottery, projectile points, or any tools made by people; features, which are non-portable man-made structures; and ecofacts, which are plant and animal remains used by people.

The real excitement began on day two.

After touring an excavated Pueblo I site at Red Cliffs, we proceeded to a bluff overlooking the Virgin River where we would work for the next six weeks. The first items on our agenda were to clear the area

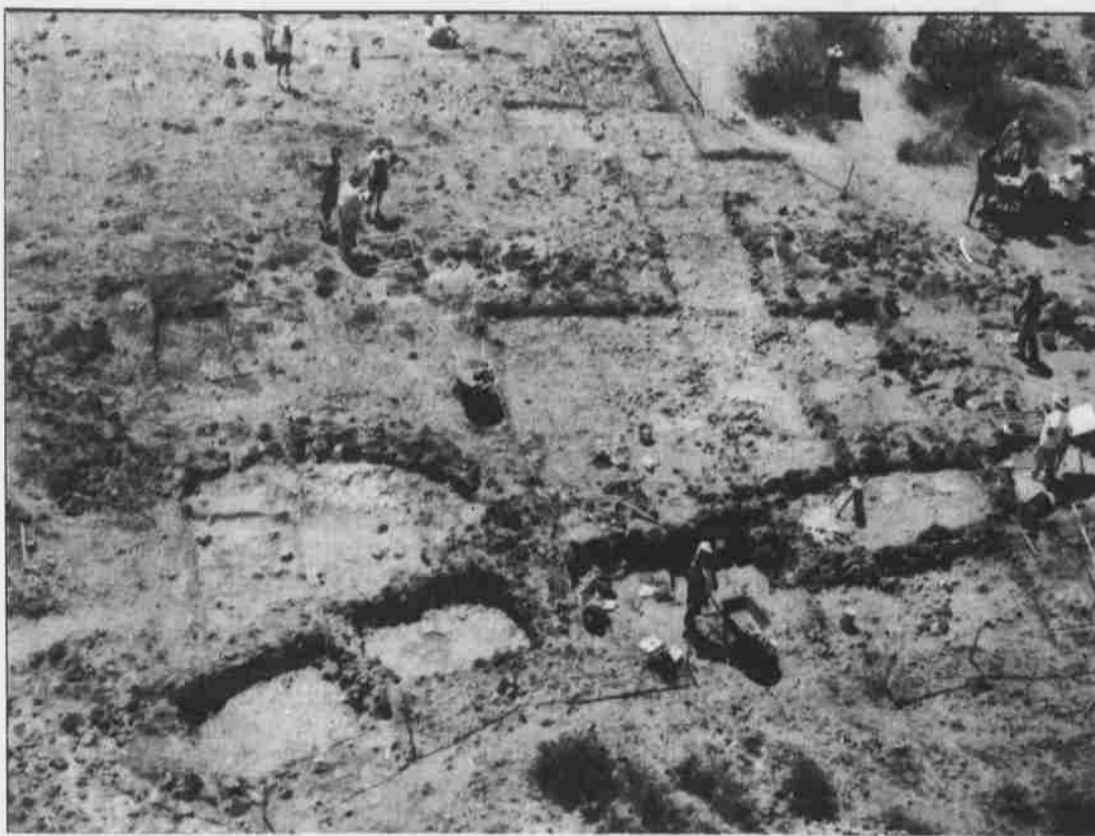


PHOTO BY JAN WILLIAMS
This aerial view of site 42Ws 3015 shows the six room blocks that UNLV's archaeologists uncovered.

stone broken off of the core. After a grueling day in the 106 degree heat, we headed for the showers.

That evening, Margaret Lyneis, also a professor at UNLV, gave us some background on the Virgin Anasazi. We learned that the site we were

seen," Buck pointed out. "Since we're concerned with artifacts, we'd like to keep careful track of those artifacts—you have to be observant so you can write about them."

We had to complete a daily excavation record, unit or feature summary and grid map for each unit excavated so that every detail, every rock and every artifact could be recorded for future research.

Knowing how to operate the electronic distance measuring device is another useful tool of the trade. Lyneis taught us how to set up and use the equipment, translate the coordinates from the machine onto the map, and draw the lines that would show the topography of the landscape, a process that requires the work of three people.

No learning experience would be complete without some recreational release. Buck prearranged a camping trip so we could take advantage of viewing other sites in the area.

Our first stop was the Anasazi Village State Park in Boulder, Utah. This provided us with a good look at a pit house, a dwelling submerged in the earth covered by a thatch roof with an entrance right through it. Camp was near Capital Reef, where we got a chance to really "rough" it.

An additional bonus was the substantial amount of rock art we saw. Mountain sheep, people, bears and deer carved into the walls told the story of a people who had long since disappeared. Modern graffiti was also evident, including dates from the 30's and 40's.

Archaeology isn't just digging in the dirt. You have to know the law. Colleen Beck from DRI took us through the National Historic Preservation Act, which establishes the national register of historic places, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the laws regarding the finding of human remains.

Our next adventure took place in the lab, housed in St. George's Bureau of Land Man-

agement warehouse. Perry oversaw the process of washing, examining, labeling and bagging the artifacts we collected in the field for further study.

It was amazing how artifacts that looked so plain in the field would, after a good water and toothbrush bath, show beautiful color and design.

We also had a chance to operate the flotation system. When soil samples were collected from the field, they were boxed and brought to the lab. After adding water to the machine, the jet action separated the dirt from any organic material—seeds, charcoal, bone—anything that could later be carbon-dated.

A flint-napping demonstration, courtesy of Wedding, was particularly interesting. An archaeology buff since age seven, he had all the tools, including antler hammers, pounding stones and leather grips to keep the rock being napped from slipping out of place.

This demonstration illustrated what the Anasazi went through to turn a fist-sized rock into a one- to three-inch arrowhead point.

The neat part came next. After demonstrating how to shatter rock, such as obsidian, Wedding passed over the tools and we got a chance to make points of our own.

Word got out to the community about the site. After an article appeared in the local paper, *The Spectrum*, visitors from the area began to come out and see what we had accomplished.

KLAS-TV 8 and *St. George Magazine*, along with representatives from the Department of Energy, visited the site on media day. Channel 8 aired a brief news report that evening on a substantial scatter of pottery found by Jana Bebe, a volunteer with the Utah Archaeological Society.

An unexpected thrill was the experience of taking aerial photos of the site from a helicopter. Buck had originally intended to use the fire de-



PHOTO BY PAUL BUCK

Feature 12, the last room excavated, is the only room where the limestone slabs remained intact. Also found were several large pottery shards and groundstones.

of surface weeds, dead creosote stumps and rocks, and set up trenches that would be sectioned off into 2 x 2 meter squares for excavation.

A lecture that evening from UNLV Prof. Alan Simmons provided a look via slides at some well-known Southwestern sites such as Mesa Verde, Chaco Canyon and Pueblo Benito, providing us with an idea of what we might find.

"Stuff gets buried over time, so we dig it up," Buck said of the next phase we embarked on. "We don't learn everything about a people just by digging a hole in the ground, but in context—where the dust blows or the river flows, stuff gets buried. We need to dig it up to look at the artifacts."

So shovels, picks and trowels went into motion, digging up the soft and hard layers of reddish dirt, looking for artifacts. Buckets of dirt had to be sifted, yielding pottery shards and lithics, which are flakes of

excavating was estimated to date between 500 and 700 AD, and that the pottery, called grayware, the Anasazi made was both plain and painted.

By the end of the first week, definite outlines of rooms were becoming visible. Larger amounts of ceramics and lithics were uncovered. In fact, in Feature One, the unit I worked in the first two weeks, we found several large rim and body shards, many of the pieces fitting together.

Week two uncovered even more artifacts: metates, or stones that were ground on; manos, stones used to grind on the metate; stone tools, including an ax head and knife-like implements; as well as several more room blocks. This pumped up the crew, which took our minds off the 110-116-degree temperatures.

Next came the paperwork. "Part of being an archaeologist is writing notes—observations about what you've