

TCAS BENCHMARK

AUGUST 2011

Volume 25, Issue 8

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Well, we have firmly rolled into the hottest time of the year in Texas. This is definitely not a time for doing field work or anything else outdoors. We do have the all day event planned at the Fort Worth Nature Center but there are several inside activities planned besides our mock archeology dig.

From now until the end of October, the board will be focused on organizing the TAS Annual Meeting and we will need everybody's help. Watch for signup sheets for specific jobs at our meetings. If you have questions about any of the jobs, please talk to one of the board members. Some of the jobs will be helping out at the Silent Auction, the registration desk, room monitors, and table decoration for the Saturday night banquet to mention a few.

After the Annual Meeting has been put to bed, we have several different projects that need to be completed at the Saint Jo site that will take us outside to do some archeology when the weather has hopefully cooled down a little bit. We will need some of volunteers to help organize this event.

Katrina Nuncio

Calendar of Activities

AUGUST

9

**ARCHEOLOGY DAY AT THE
FORT WORTH NATURE CENTER
(SEE PAGE 2)**

11

**TCAS MONTHLY MEETING
(SEE MAP ON PAGE 5)**

SEPTEMBER

8

**TCAS MONTHLY MEETING
(SEE MAP ON PAGE 5)**

OCTOBER

**2011 TEXAS ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
ANNUAL MEETING ~ FORT WORTH
(MUCH MORE COMING IN FUTURE
"BENCHMARKS")**

INSIDE:

TEXAS STATE STUDENTS DIGGING INTO HISTORY

COMSTOCK — Near the end of another brutally hot day in the desert of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands, there finally was something to cheer about among the crew digging at the Little Sotol archaeological site, hidden in a far-flung corner of a ranch north of here.

For a month, students under the guidance of Texas State University archaeologist Stephen Black and his two grad students had been nosing around in a pair of holes at the bottom of Dead Man's Creek Canyon in search of food scraps in an earthen oven more than 5,000 years old.

After seven hours of delicately wielding brushes, dustpans and trowels in a choreographed dance of discovery, Jacob Combs hit prehistoric pay dirt: a wafer-thin piece of charcoal, found near the Little Sotol oven.

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AUGUST MONTHLY MEETING **EDDIE OSBURN** **LITHICS: REAL OR FAKE**

August's speaker is our own Eddie Osburn. Here, in his own words, is an overview of his presentation...

"I have a nice collection of authentic Native American points. Because I am a flintknapper I also have several display cases filled with modern reproductions I have made. People often ask "How does anyone tell the difference?"

My presentation will cover the answer to that question. This will include an explanation of patina (and the patination process) with slides showing patina under magnification. I'll show how step fractures are stained with mineral deposits where the flint broke on authentic points (not clean like on modern points). I'll also show slides that depict the use of UV light. UV light is one of the most useful tools in detecting new fractures. I will also bring a black light and demonstrate how different "old" flint looks compared to flint that has been recently fractured.

This purpose of this presentation is to entertain, not to educate, because an archeologist (professional or avocational) does not need anyone to tell them that the point they just excavated is authentic. But if anyone ever did wonder how to distinguish the real thing from the fake, I believe this presentation will go a long way in answering that question. "



Don't forget about our outing at the Fort Worth Nature Center on **August 9th**. Come and spend the day with us, both outside and inside the air conditioned center. There will be a mock excavation, flint knapping, corn grinding and other activities for the elementary school youth. If you are

interested in participating contact Glynn Osburn at

gosburn@tx.rr.com

TEXAS STATE STUDENTS DIGGING INTO HISTORY

ARCHAEOLOGISTS AT TEXAS STATE FIELD SCHOOL SEEK OUT CLUES ABOUT PREHISTORIC NOMADIC TRIBES

ROY BRAGG

MY SAN ANTONIO

JULY 3, 2011

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

A tiny sliver of charcoal doesn't seem like much, but in the world of archaeology, it's huge. When that piece of charcoal — possibly petrified food — is catalogued and carbon-dated, it will work in concert with other items found here, as well as finds from other sites in this region, to help fill major holes in the story of nomadic tribes in prehistoric North America.

Black climbed into the small, square hole — roughly a meter wide and a meter deep — with Combs and surveyed the walls. He asked Combs pointed questions about the precise moment he found the match-book-size piece of coal. After they discussed the find, they bagged it, gingerly climbed out, gathered up their tools and knocked off 30 minutes early.

For decades, archaeologists and tourists have come to this region, located just this side of the Trans-Pecos, to marvel at ancient paintings that dot cave walls in some of the roughest landscape in Texas.

While cave art is a breathtaking representation of early life, these scientists say Little Sotol — which gets its name from the plant most often cooked in the ovens — represents the nuts and bolts of everyday life.

"Cave art is sexy," said Charles Koenig, a graduate student surveying the lands around the Little Sotol site. "But we're trying to see how they worked the landscape."

Tiffany Osburn, a Texas Historical Commission archaeologist who came to visit Black's field school, agreed. "People tend to go for ritual and mystical stuff," she said. "And cave art captures the imagination more than the practical domestic matters."



Texas State University assistant professor Steve Black writes in a field log at the site of the TSU Summer Archaeological Field School in Val Verde County near the Devil's River.

The prevailing story, Black said, is that groups of hunter-gatherers roamed this landscape 7,000 years ago, subsisting on berries and venison. They moved from canyon to canyon, seeking locations where shelter, water and food were easily accessible. When one site was depleted, they moved to the next. They cooked when they had to do so because it was labor-intensive and took a long time.

But at some point, cooked plants took over as the mainstay of their diet. And a large part of that diet was sotol, a desert shrub that grows in West Texas canyons.

The earthen ovens were rings of elaborately stacked stones. Hot stones were placed in the bottom, cooking the plant underneath layers of plants and dirt.

The question is: how often the Little Sotol oven was used, which radiocarbon dating will help pin down.

One theory, Black said, holds that a major drought decimated the easily gathered berries and deer populations, which in turn forced the tribes to eat more sotol. Another holds that the population outgrew the surroundings, which also would explain more sotol cooking.

And that's why finds such as Combs' piece of charcoal are important.

"The depth of prehistory and the way we have to piece it together is the only way we have to fill in the blanks in history," said Osburn, who visited the site in mid-June. "Archaeology is incremental and cumulative."

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: MEET GENE RAINWATER

BY MIKE SHANNON

Walter E. "Gene" Rainwater was born in Oklaunion, Tx and grew up in Vernon, Tx. Gene enlisted in the Army Air Corp in 1941. He applied for and was accepted into the Officers Cadet Program on December 6, 1941. Needless to say, the war began the following morning. Gene was sent to be trained as a navigation instructor at the Pan American Airlines navigation school. He was among the first group of airmen to be trained as navigational instructors. He also helped ferry B-17 bombers overseas during this period.



After the war Gene transitioned with the Army Air Corp to the Air Force and remained in the Air Force reserves, retiring as a Lt. Colonel. He also worked for and retired from the Internal Revenue Service.

Mrs. Georgia Rainwater has traveled a lot over the years with Gene. Mrs. Rainwater has been a teacher of music in the public school system; she worked a season putting up Christmas mail for the Post Office and is a soloist in her church choir.

Now I will let Gene tell you, in his own words, how he got involved in Texas archeology.

"About 1974, a year prior to my retirement, my brother-in-law, Billy Bunch, talked me into joining the TCAS. He was quite active in the club and needed some help, especially in preparing for the annual field school; a chore in which he always went a day or two early and set up plumbing, showers, electricity for the lab, and whatever he could do to get things ready. I helped him in this chore and about a year and a half after I joined the club. I was elected President, not because of my special knowledge, but our membership was rather low at that time and no one wanted the job. After a couple of years, my presence at the field school and my title as President of the local club apparently made someone think I was experienced in the field and I was appointed a Regional Vice President of the Texas Archeological Society. I had always had some interest in archeology and had taken a one year course in archeology while in college.

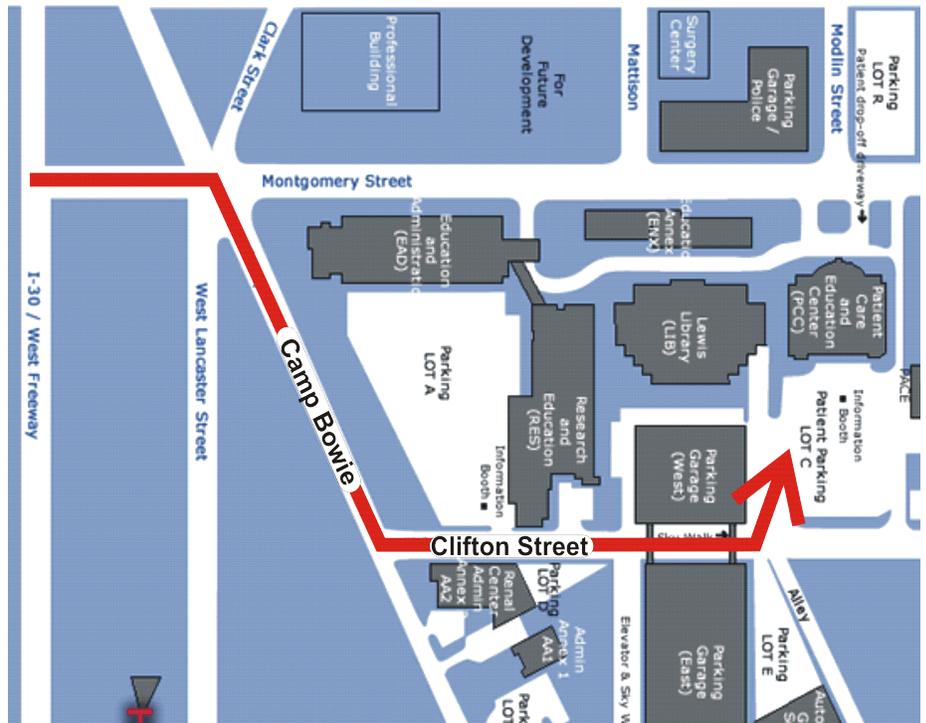
My interest increased over the years and, in addition to local digs and the annual field school, I started visiting interesting archeological sites in Mexico and Central America. I went two seasons to Belize on a dig and while there, I became quite interested in the Mayan culture and made extensive visits to various Mayan sites in Belize, Honduras, and Guatemala.

My wife and I enjoyed traveling so I made it a point to visit archeological sites all through Mexico. As my wife seemed to enjoy seeing these places, we made it a practice to visit other such sites and traveled extensively overseas and visited well known archeological sites in the British Isles, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt, Turkey, China and all through Europe and the Middle east.

As I am now in my middle 90's, I am not quite as active as I once was, but my interest in archeology has had a tremendous influence on my enjoyment of traveling throughout the world."

TCAS meets at 7:30PM, the 2nd Thursday of each month at the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC), 3500 Camp Bowie Blvd., in Fort Worth.

The location is centrally located in Tarrant County near the intersection of Camp Bowie and Montgomery Street about two miles west of downtown. Take Clifton Street off of Camp Bowie (one block east of the Montgomery intersection) to Parking Lot "C" on your left (west). Park in the patient spaces (after 5PM) and go past the information booth into the underground parking garage. Turn left down the corridor at the double doors in the center. Proceed down the hallway until you come to room 110.



(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

Little Sotol was discovered in January when the ranch owner was using a front-end loader to scoop dirt to fix potholes. After grabbing one load, he noticed a ring of black rock. He recognized the significance — black rock indicates stone that was burned — and called Black, a specialist in this region.

That site was too damaged to study, but within minutes, Koenig stumbled upon Little Sotol, a ring of blackened stone, at the entrance of a low-hanging cave, on the banks of a dry creek bed.

The field school, which was the first month of the project, was funded by foundation grants, private donations and some money from Texas State, Black said.

From here on, however, funding is iffy.

While the field school has ended, grad students Koenig and Knapp will remain for the rest of the summer, working with any students who volunteer to stay behind to finish the dig. Both grad students draw a salary as teaching assistants.

After that, however, comes data crunching and lab work, which isn't cheap. A Comstock botanist has volunteered to study the organic matter for free, Black said, but it will cost \$600 to carbon date each individual piece of charcoal.

Success is the ultimate lure for more funding.



The excavation site of the Texas State University Archaeology Summer Field School shows a stone midden where archaeologists believe ancient people cooked food in large in-ground ovens somewhat similar to a modern pig roast or luau.

TARRANT COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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