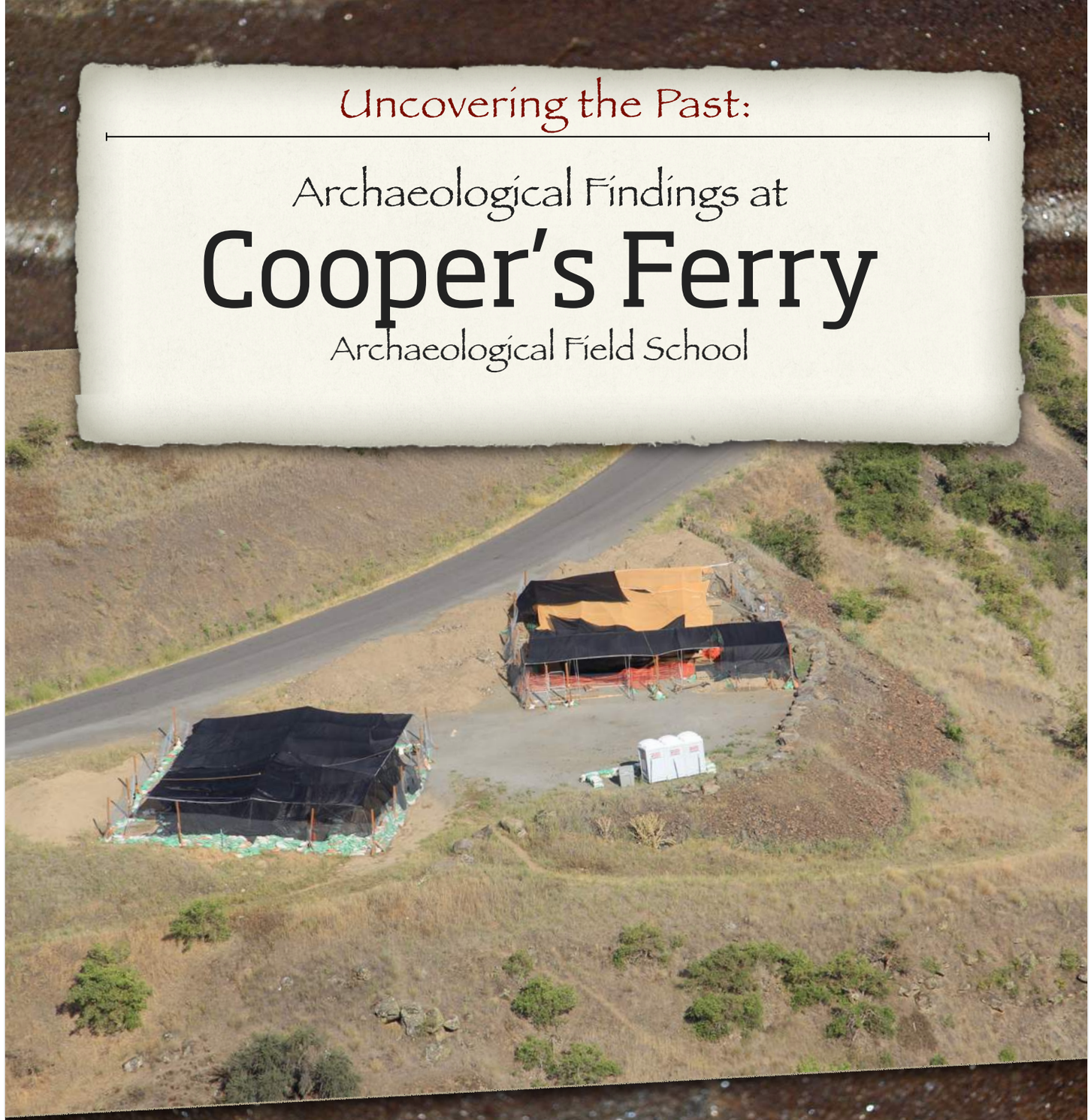
Uncovering the Past:

Archaeological Findings at

Cooper's Ferry

Archaeological Field School



Research and findings:

Dr. Loren Davis

Created by:

Hayden Wilcox

Chapter 1

SITE SUMMARY

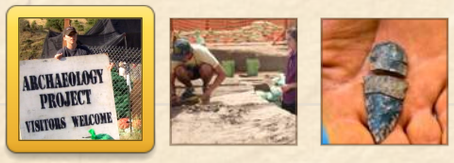
Have you ever wondered about how humans first came to North America? Have you ever thought about what life would have been like as a hunter or gatherer in the times of Mammoths, Mastodons, and 12 foot tall Giant Ground Sloths? What was life like back in the days where the ice caps were finally receding from their icy hold over most of the northern United States.

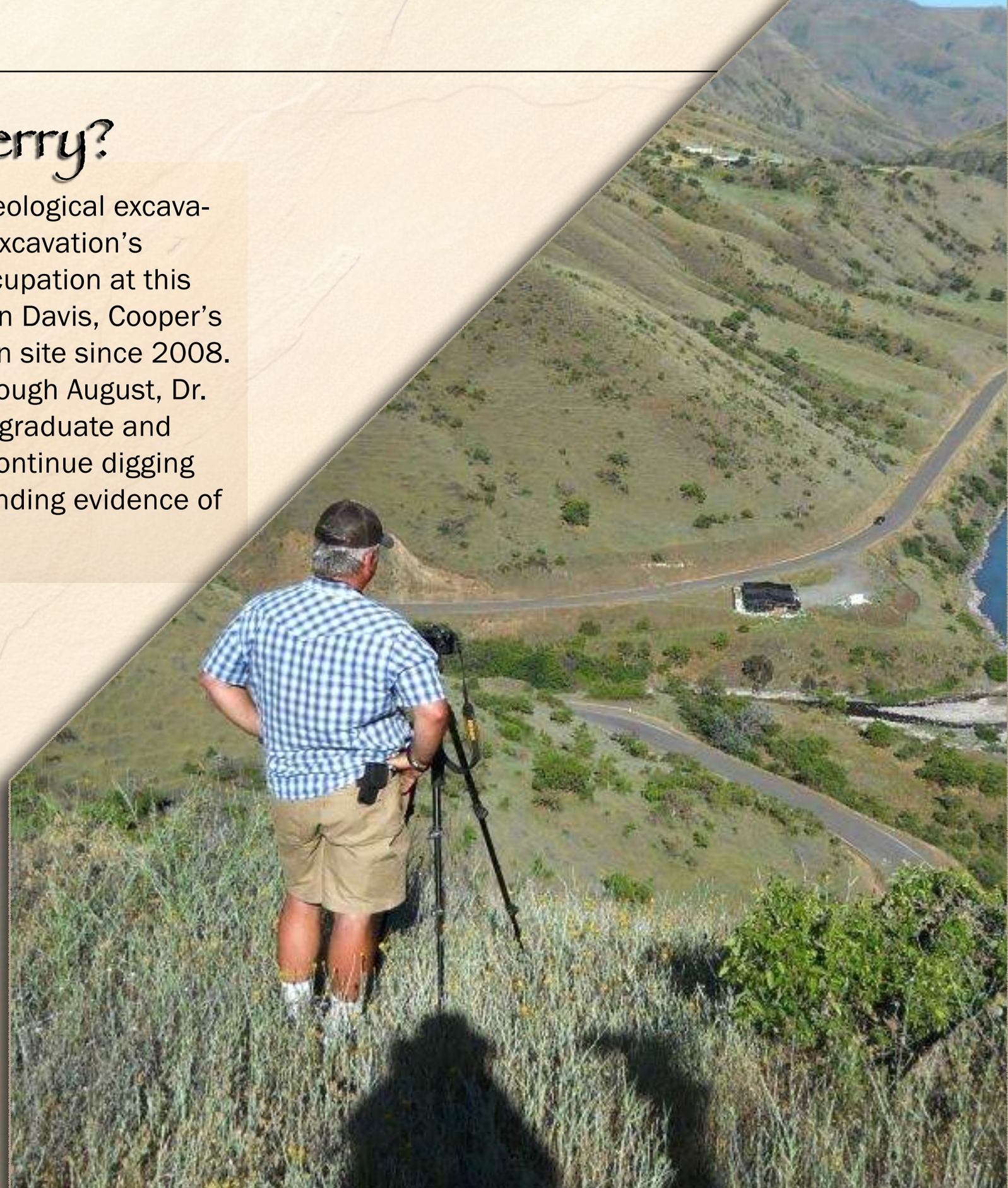
Cooper's Ferry is a prehistoric, pre-contact archaeological site that may help researchers determine what life was like at the end of the last ice age, determine how humans may have interacted with their environment, and even answer the question: who were the first people to step foot on American soil?

What is Cooper's Ferry?

Cooper's Ferry is an active prehistorical archaeological excavation site located along the Salmon River. The excavation's primary focus is to find evidence of human occupation at this location. Originally opened in 1997 by Dr. Loren Davis, Cooper's Ferry has been an ongoing seasonal excavation site since 2008. Every summer, between the month of June through August, Dr. Davis and his team of Oregon State University graduate and undergraduate students reopen the site and continue digging deeper and deeper into the past in hopes of finding evidence of the first humans to settle in North America.

The excavation site is open Wednesday through Sunday for visitor and public tours.





Why are researchers interested?

Cooper's Ferry is one of only a handful of sites in the Pacific Northwest that has not only yielded stone tools of a very unique style and design, but data also suggests that these tools are found in a time period previously thought to be uninhabited by man.

These stone tools found at the site are unlike other stone tools of similar nature found anywhere else east of the Rocky Mountains and may represent an entirely different tribe of early humans that migrated from Asia to North America during the Ice Age.

The nature of where these stone tools are being found, along with other features that are indicative of human habitation - such as fire pits, "trash piles", and other clues - indicate that these early peoples or "Paleo Indians" may have been among the first people to inhabit what is now modern day Oregon, Idaho, and Washington.

Where is Cooper's Ferry?

Cooper's Ferry is located in Northern Idaho, close to the Idaho-Oregon-Washington border. Specifically the Cooper's Ferry excavation site is located alongside the Salmon River in the Lower Salmon River Canyon region.

Cooper's Ferry can be found just 15 miles west of the town of Cottonwood Idaho, and can be found directly at the intersection of Graves Creek and the Salmon River.

Who funds the site?

The Cooper's Ferry excavation site and the Cooper's Ferry Archaeological Field school are directly supported by two major entities: Oregon State University and the United States Bureau of Land Management.

The site is also supported by several private supporters such as The Keystone Archaeological Research Fund, The Bernice Peltier Huber Charitable Trust, and the National Geographic Society

Professor of Anthropology at Oregon State University, Dr. Loren Davis is the lead archaeologist of the Cooper's Ferry excavation site and the director and instructor of the field school.

David Sisson is the head archaeologist for the Bureau of Land Management Cor' Delane district, and oversees the BLM interest of the Cooper's Ferry site.

Chapter 2

HISTORY

The most commonly asked question by visitors to the Cooper's Ferry site is: "How do you know where to dig?"

To answer that question we not only have to look at the artifacts that we're finding at the site, but how and what ancient peoples would have been doing here in the Lower Salmon River Canyon thousands of years ago.

In order to figure out why we should excavate here, we need to image what the environment would have looked like thousands of years ago, and work towards the present day.

Geologic History of Lower Salmon River Canyon

Dr. Loren Davis explains how the Cooper's Ferry locality was formed long before the arrival of man.

The Salmon River Canyon wasn't always shaped the way we see it today. Over the course of many thousands of years many forces have transformed the landscape through erosion and deposition.

Researchers at the Cooper's Ferry site need to understand how the environment at the Cooper's Ferry location was formed in order to understand what the environment looked like near the end of the last Ice Age, and determine if the landscape was hospitable for human living spaces.

Dr. Davis believes that Paleo Indians of this time period would have returned to this particular site seasonally to escape from harsh heat from the prairie during the summer time. He also believes that the intersection of the Salmon River and Rock Creek would have provided an excellent "highway" to and from the prairie to the river. This is one of the reasons why researchers chose this site to excavate.

FUN FACTS?

- *The Salmon River hasn't had Salmon in it for nearly 2,000 years.*
- *The entire canyon was carved from high flowing water over thousands of years.*
- *The average depth of the river is SOMEODD feet deep.*
- *Rafting tours often pass by the Cooper's Ferry site and are welcome to stop by for a tour of the site.*

1930:
Works Progress Administration

Scroll:

During the beginning of the 20th Century, the Cooper's Ferry Locality as we know it today would have been indistinguishable from the surrounding canyon landscape: steep, sloping hills cascaded into the rushing Salmon River.

In the 1930's, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Idaho state officials noticed that the naturally occurring passage from the Idaho plains to the canyon depths was the perfect spot for the new "Highway 99", which would cut across Idaho's landscape to connect neighboring towns.

For several years, bulldozers, trucks and dynamite blasted away at the slopes of the canyon; creating a flat surface-- enough to lay a road across. Soon thereafter however, the United States entered into World War II, and funding to the project was cut before the highway could be properly finished.

Scroll:

The Cooper's Ferry site would almost never have been found if it weren't for the curiosity of one man.

In the early 1960s, a professor: Dr. B. Robert Butler of University of Idaho, was passing through the town of Cottonwood, Idaho when he noticed strange artifacts he had never seen before. These artifacts were on display in a local grocery store.

When he asked the shop owner where they had found the "arrowheads", the locals showed him a small terrace near the river where they had been gathering sand for their gardens. This was the same terrace that the WPA had cleared nearly 30 years prior to make way for the road.

Intrigued by what he found after an initial look at the site, Butler began excavating the site the following summer. Using backhoes, spades and hours upon hours of man hours, B. Robert Butler and his team found lots of artifacts that looked completely different to those seen anywhere else in the United States.

1930: Dr. B. Robert. Butler

Breaking Ground

Shots taken from the initial excavation of the Cooper's Ferry location by Dr. B. Robert Butler (University of Idaho) in the early 1960s

Weapons Cache Found in 1997

This collection of rocks are actually a series of primitive tools from the age of early man. There are three 'Cores' (Raw materials from which stone tools would be made) [Left], A 'Hammerstone' [Center], two 'Blades' [Top Right], and four 'Projectile Points' [Bottom right]

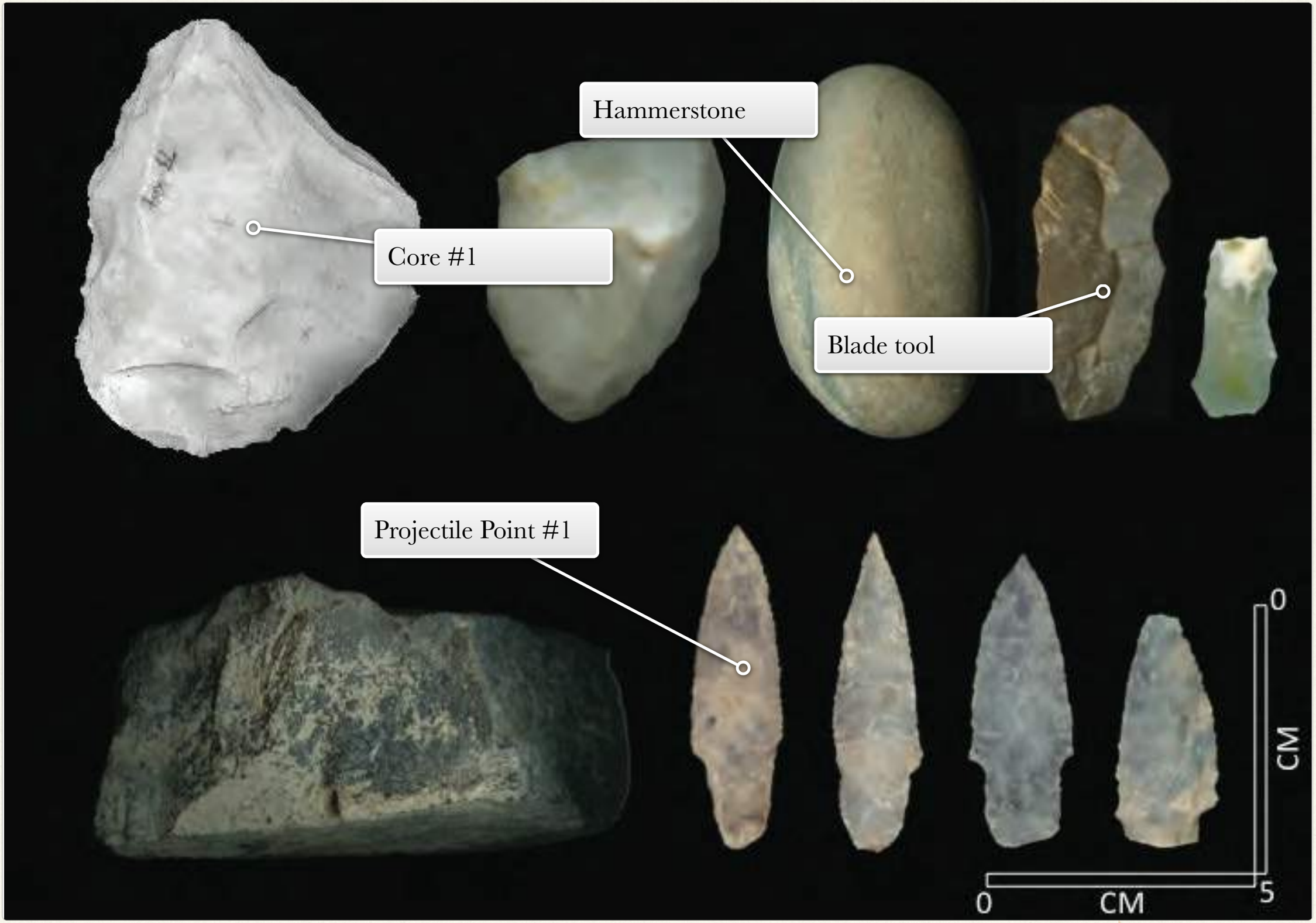
1997: Dr. Loren Davis

Scroll:

Years later, Loren Davis, then working on his Master's Thesis for his dissertation, took an interest in Butler's research. By matching old photos, gathering testimonies from local residents, and with support from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Dr. Davis made an educated guess at where he believed the old site to be, and in 1997, dug a "test pit" to see if there was any more evidence of early peoples at the location.

At 3 meters deep (~ 9feet) Dr. Davis' discovered a "weapon's cache" made up of several stone tools that, under analysis, showed evidence of use at some point.

Tap to learn more about Dr. Davis' "weapons cache"



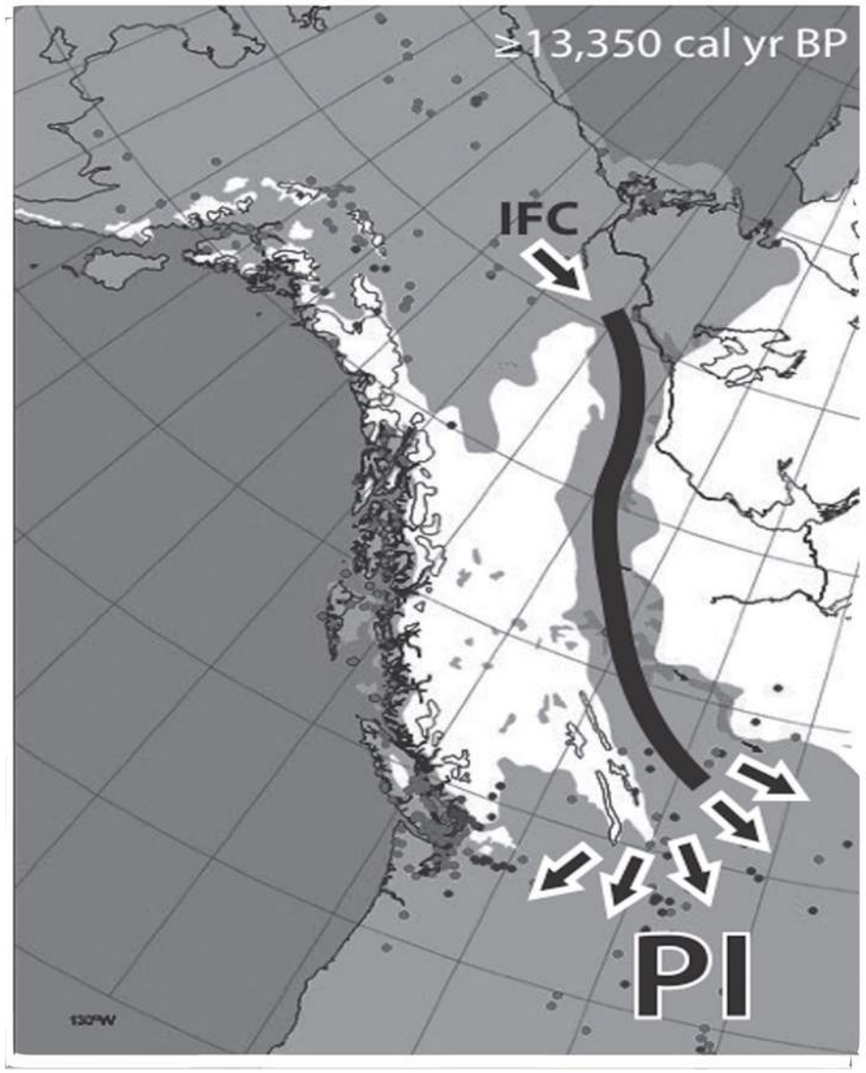
Chapter 3

BIG PICTURE

Cooper's Ferry may represent one of the oldest archaeological sites in the Pacific Northwest.

Many archaeologists believe that the first people to come to North America migrated over during the end of the last Ice Age. The commonly held theory about how people came to the new world is largely in part due to a prehistoric site in northern Montana. The site in Montana suggests humans migrated to North America nearly 12,500 calendar years ago.

Evidence found at Cooper's Ferry suggests that at least one band of people was in the Salmon River canyon nearly 1,500 years prior to the people found in northern Montana.



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SECTION 9

The First People

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SECTION 11

The Debate

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SECTION 12

The Western Stemmed Argument

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SECTION 13

What does it mean?

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Chapter 4

EXCAVATION and DISCOVERIES

Cooper's Ferry may represent one of the oldest archaeological sites in the Pacific Northwest.

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Evidence found at Cooper's Ferry suggests that at least one band of people was in the Salmon River canyon nearly 1,500 years prior to the people found in northern Montana.

The Site

Cooper's Ferry was officially opened in 1997 as part of a preliminary investigation to find evidence of human occupation here at the intersection of Rock Creek and the Salmon River. This initial investigation team, lead by Dr. Loren Davis excavated a one-by-one meter square unit down three meters below the current layer of top soil.

In 2008 the site was officially transformed into an archaeological field school, which is an active classroom eight hours per day, five days per week, Wednesday through Sunday.

Over the course of five years, students and staff members helped gradually expand Cooper's Ferry from a 1 x 1 meter square unit into a 4 x10 meter rectangle that contains 10 active excavation units.

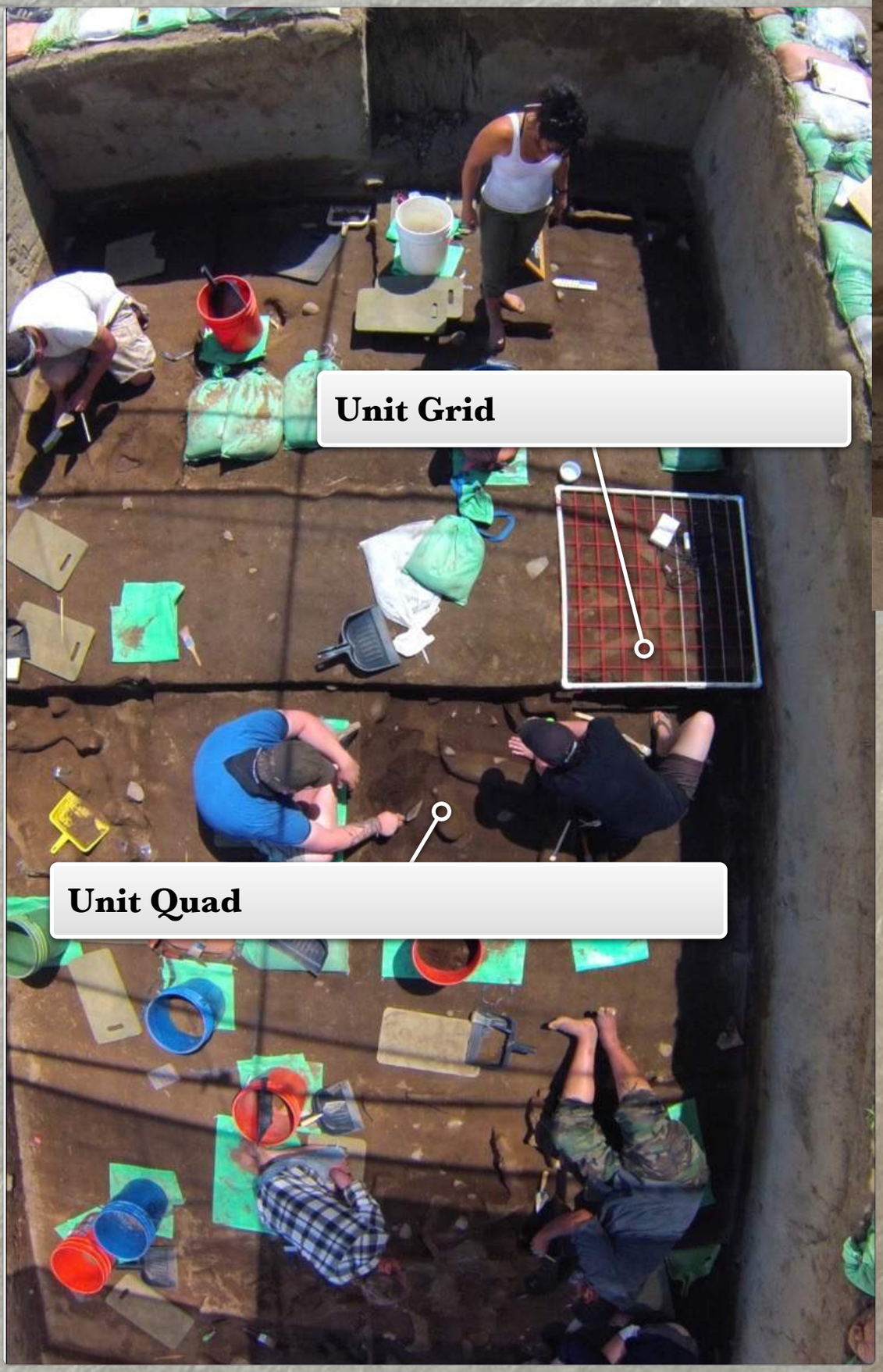
In 2012 a second excavation site was added to the project, this is known as "Area B" and was originally 3 x 3 meters. In 2014 Area B was expanded to 12 x 12 meters, which is it's current size.

The Current State of Excavation

One of the more common questions we are asked at the Cooper's Ferry site is "Why don't you just use a big machine to dig into the ground and pull everything up? Why do you have to dig everything out so carefully?"

Archaeology is a scientific process that involves understanding artifacts in context -- which means that researchers need to collect as much data as possible to correctly understand and identify artifacts and patterns in a site.

Taking a backhoe to the site and digging a big hole in the ground would tell us what we already know: that there were humans here in the past. However, without finding artifacts in sediment layers in which they were originally placed, everything we would find would be essentially useless because we wouldn't know where things were through time.



During excavation, it is essential to know exactly where an artifact comes from in space. Archaeologists carefully excavate sediment centimeters at a time with a trowel to be as accurate as possible.

Both excavation sites at Cooper's Ferry are cut into a grid pattern. Each square in the grid is 1 x 1 meters square. This square is called a "unit" and is given a recognition letter such as "A" or "B".

The unit is commonly split into four equal squares, called "quads", which are excavated one at a time.

Archaeologists will trowel away the sediment in a quad ten centimeters at a time, and will bring it down to a flat surface, known as a 'level'. If they find anything while excavating they carefully note where it is in the unit.

The Tools

Excavating an archaeological site is a destructive process, which means that once sediment or artifacts are moved or removed from a site, they can never be put back exactly as it was before.

Imagine building a sandcastle, then knocking it over and then trying to rebuild it exactly as it was, sand grain by sand grain. It would be impossible to do!

Since excavation is a destructive process archaeologists need to be extremely careful about what and how they excavate around artifacts. Instead of using big shovels to carve out holes in the landscape, archaeologists use small tools like trowels, brushes, skim shovels, and wooden skewers that don't damage artifacts.

Excavation is a very slow process, and taking a single quad down ten centimeters can take an experienced archaeologist anywhere from 20 mins to 2 hours to excavate depending upon what they find along the way.

Let's take a look at some of the tools used at the site.

Tools of the Trade

- *Context is key:*
  Archaeologists have to find objects next to each other to gather clues about how the objects relate to each other.
- *Every little piece helps:*

Everything larger than a dime found at the site is recorded by a special data collection program called "Archie". Anything smaller than a dime is put in a tiny bag to be looked at later.

Rubbermaid
2in
50.8mm

SECTION 17

The Process of Excavation

The process of excavation is delicate but simple. At Cooper's Ferry the goal is to find everything in the ground exactly as it was placed, as much as possible.

Using trowels, wooden skewers, and brushes, archaeologists remove sediment from around objects of a certain size. Anything that is dime-sized or larger is kept in the ground, drawn, and mapped.

ALL THINGS IN THEIR PLACE

- *When archaeologists remove artifacts they want to be very careful that they don't alter them or damage them in any way. The trowel is used to move sediment like a brush, but is not typically used to remove an artifact from the ground. For that, archaeologists will use a wooden skewer.*
- *Commonly archaeologists at the Cooper's Ferry site will draw boxes in the dirt around artifacts larger than a dime so that they can avoid them until the artifacts are ready to be mapped.*

Anything smaller than a dime is put into a bucket and taken to the screening station.

At the screening station archaeologists send buckets of sediment through two different sizes of metal screens to find any small artifacts they might have missed.

Fish bones, tiny pieces of animal bone, charcoal bits and tiny flakes of stone are commonly found in the screen. Once the tiny pieces of sediment are pushed through the screen, only the artifacts remain. These artifacts are sorted by type of material and put into small plastic bags to be examined later.

Things larger than a dime are mapped in with a Total Station -- a laser mounted distance measuring tool that can give the exact X,Y and Z coordinates in space of that artifact.

Once the object, it's location in space, and it's material have be documented, the artifact is ready to be removed and put into an appropriate container to be observed later.

This excavation process procedure continues until the unit is "at level" -- meaning the unit has been excavated 10 cm (about 4 inches) straight down on all sides.

SECTION 18

Your Turn to Excavate!

Ready to test what you've learned? The next few pages contain levels for you to excavate, but you won't need your trowel. Just simply swipe over the photo with your finger to excavate the level.

Excavation WIDGET!

Look what you found!

Excavation WIDGET!

With Krotovina

Look what you found!

Artifacts Collected

Artifacts: What We've Found

Cooper's Ferry is a classroom, but it's also a live excavation site, which means that every day there's a chance of finding something amazing while excavating.

It's one thing to read about archaeological findings, or to view pictures of them in a book, but students at the Cooper's Ferry Archaeological Field School actually get to discover and hold object that haven't seen the light of day for thousands of years.

Some students explained that they felt an indescribable connection with the past when they hold an artifact that was last used by someone who died thousands of years before the birth of Jesus Christ or

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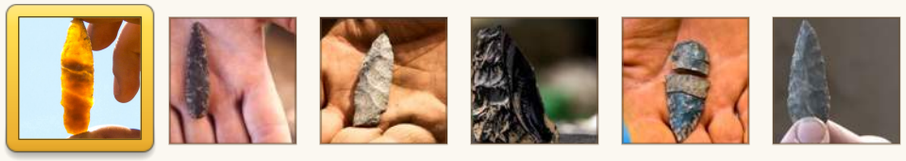
Projectile points, like the one seen here, are only found in this part of the world -- making them a unique marker to the culture that lived in the Northwest thousands of years ago



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SECTION 20

"CSI" Clues: Pulling it together

USE Archie Point cloud data
Whole site
Just Shells
Just FCR
Just Debitage

Each per page
Last page “educated guess” of what the site once looked like overly

Chapter 5

COOPER'S FERRY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL

After deciding that the Cooper's Ferry site was going to be an extensive project -- and too much for a single person to handle, Dr. Davis decided to use the site as a teaching tool and founded the "Cooper's Ferry Archeological Field School; sponsored by OSU" . Here, students from all over the country who have an interest in archaeological pursuits, can come and get their hands dirty and directly apply their studies on a real excavation site. 2013 marks the 5th consecutive season of the field school that takes place over 8 weeks during the summer.

The aluminum pole structure is lightweight so it can be easily torn down and rebuilt at the beginning and end of each field season.

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SECTION 21

What is a field school?

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SECTION 22

What is field school like?

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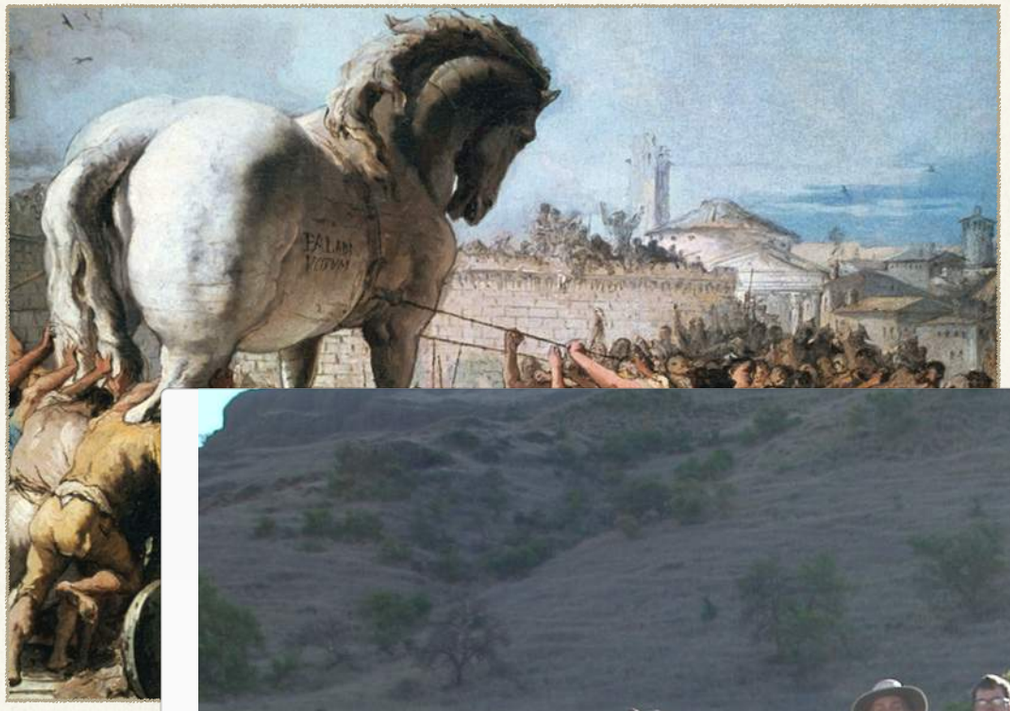
SECTION 23

Intro to Students and

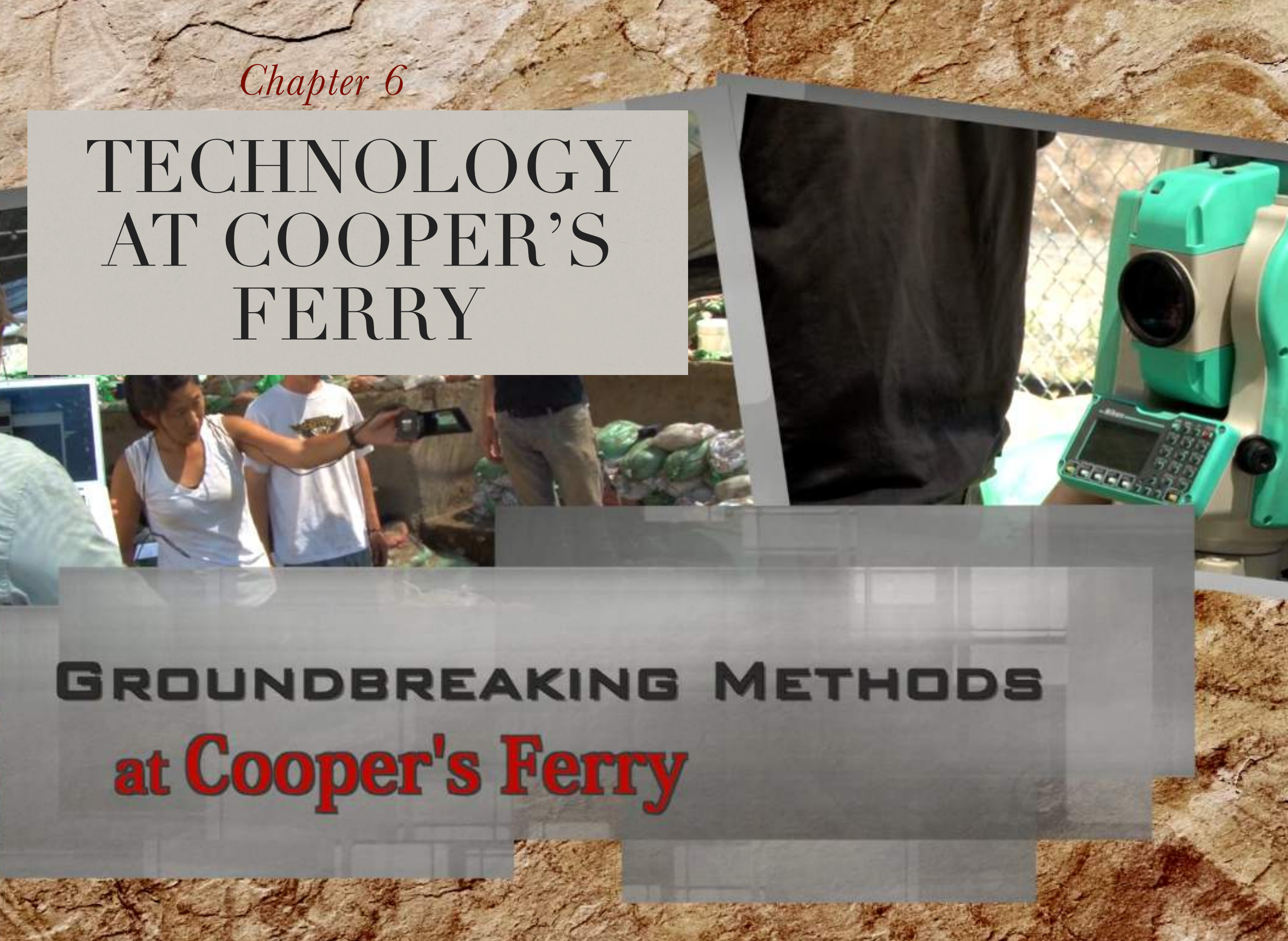


LOREM IPSUM

Need New photos!

Chapter 6

TECHNOLOGY AT COOPER'S FERRY



Groundbreaking Methods at Cooper's Ferry

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SECTION 24

After an object is found

Recut Technology video for just when an artifact is found.

Or Photo gallery

LOREM IPSUM

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SECTION 25

Tech Toys

Page Per Device:
GoPro

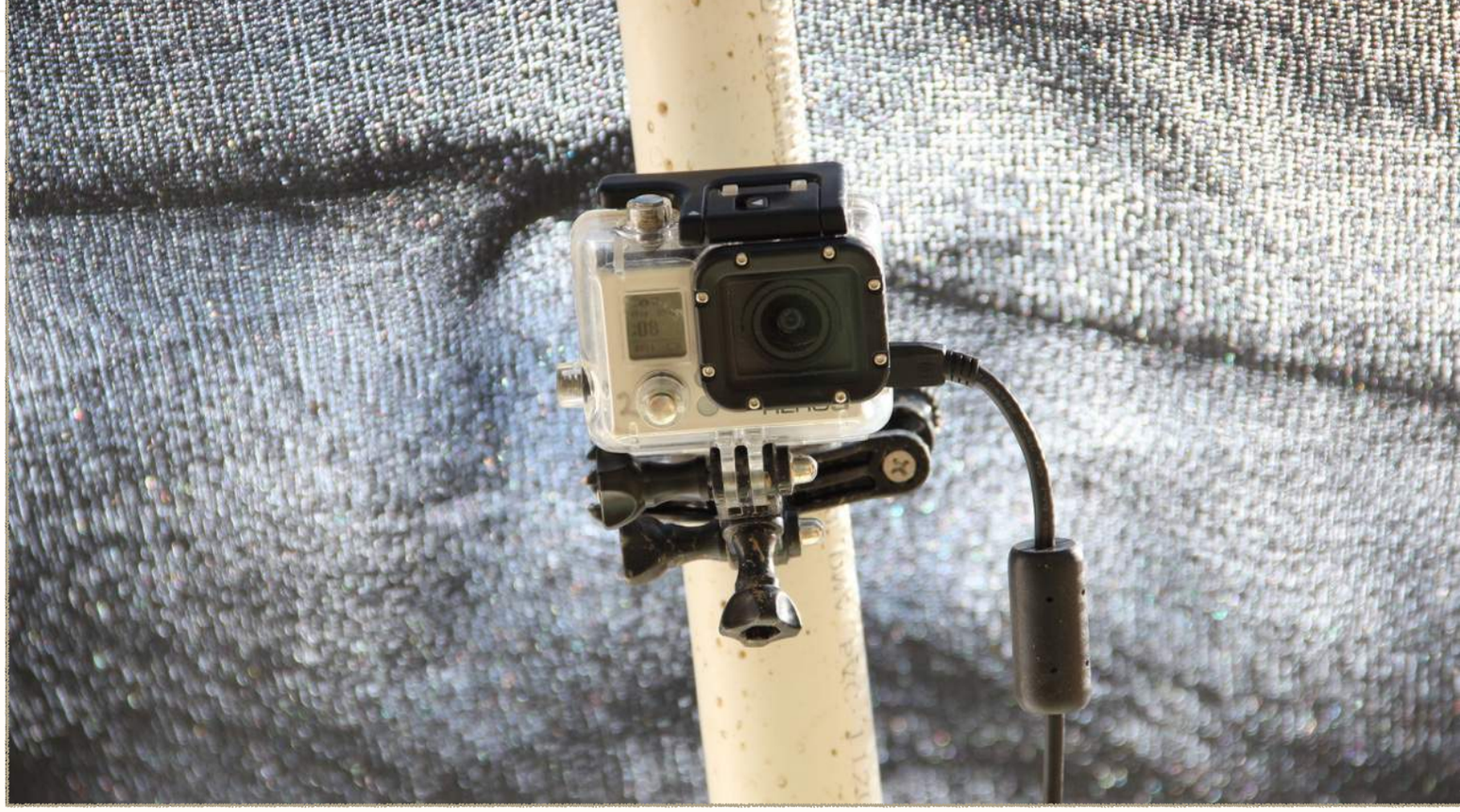
Total Station

Archie (computers + data log)

Camera + Jib

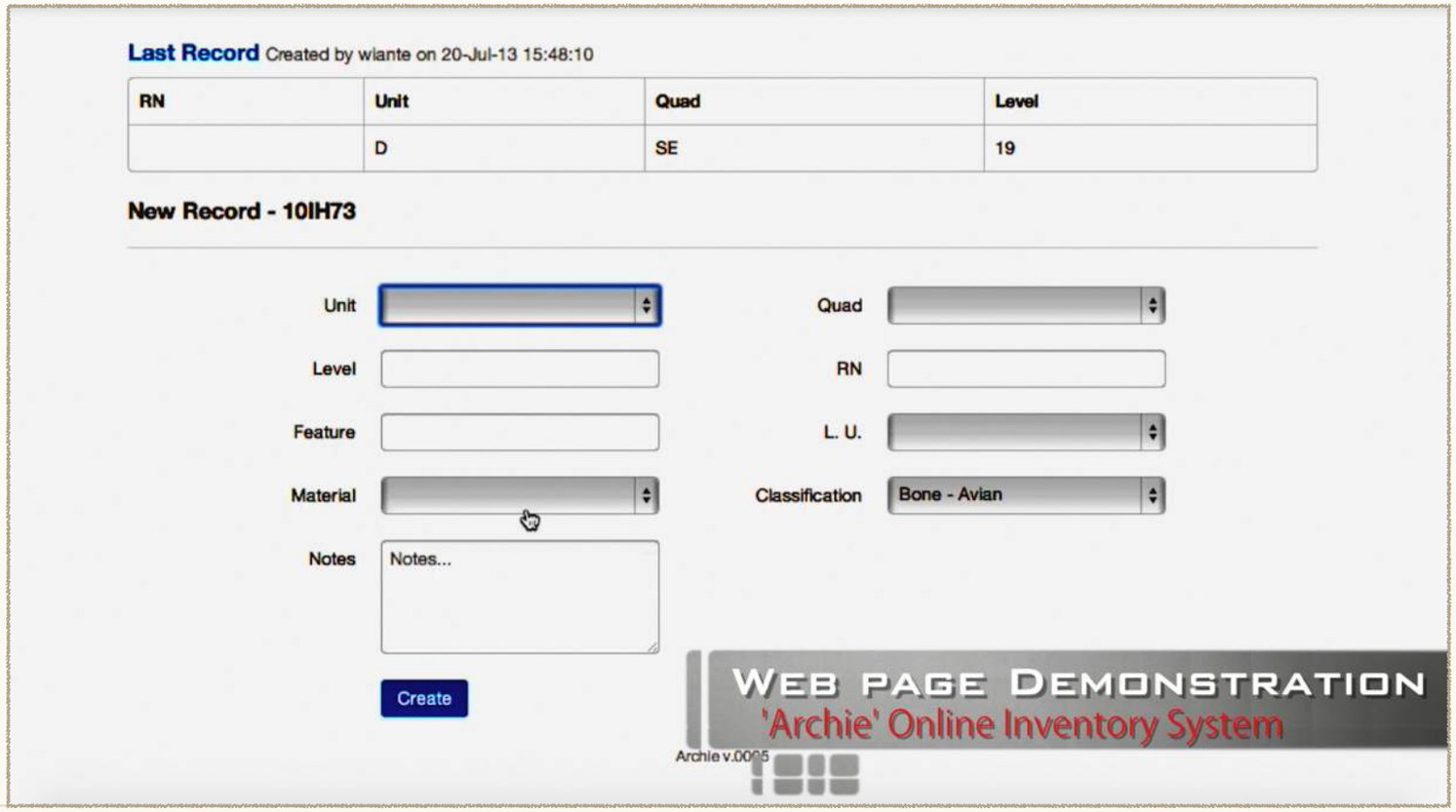
X Box Kinect
3D Scan / Print

GoPro



Eee PC
Archie :: Login
Login
1
LabelWriter 450 Turbo

Archie


Last Record Created by wlante on 20-Jul-13 15:48:10
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Unit
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Level
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New Record - 10IH73
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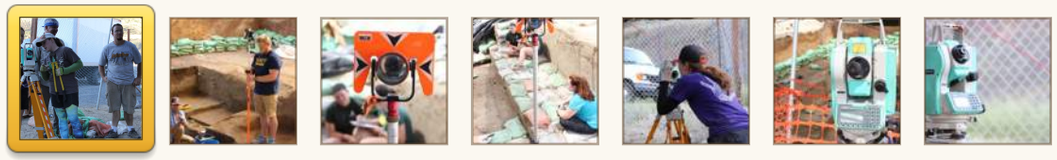
Create
Archie v.0005
Web page Demonstration
'Archie' Online Inventory System

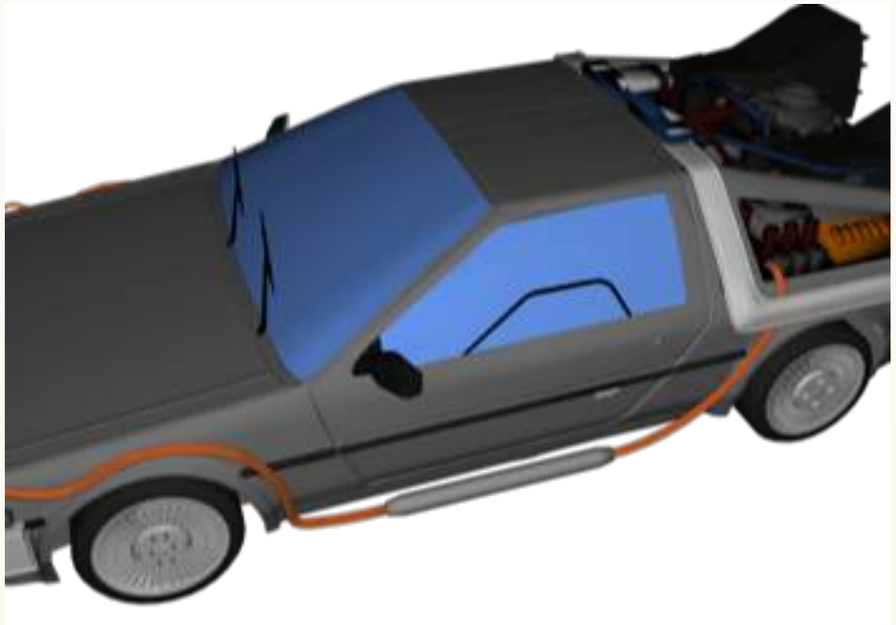
Total Station



Kinect

Utilizing an open source program, Archaeologists at the site use this Xbox Kinect device as a 3D Scanner.

3D Scan / Print



Camera + Jib

The Video Guys!

YAAAAYYYYY

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SECTION 26

Technology and interpretaton

Archie Point cloud data:

Show 3D model of site with/ without shell/FCR/ Deb/ etc
Hypothesis of living conditions

Chapter 7

WRAP UP

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SECTION 27

First Americans

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SECTION 28

A new hypothesis

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SECTION 29

Field School Impact

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SECTION 30

Cutting Edge Site

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Archaeology

Archaeology, or archeology, is the study of human activity in the past, primarily through the recovery and analysis of the material culture and environmental data that they have left behind, which includes artifacts, architecture, biofacts (also known as eco-facts) and cultural landscapes (the archaeological record). Because archaeology employs a wide range of different procedures, it can be considered to be both a science and a humanity, and in the United States it is thought of as a branch of anthropology, although in Europe it is viewed as a separate discipline.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

DISSERTATION

A long essay on a particular subject, esp. one written as a requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

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Ph.D.

Anthropology, University of Alberta,

Edmonton, Canada

2001

M.A.I.S.

Anthropology, Geography, Soil Science,

Oregon State University

1995

B.Sc.

Anthropology, Oregon State University

1991

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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SEDIMENT

Particulate matter that is carried by water or wind and deposited on the surface of the land or the bottom of a body of water, and may in time become consolidated into rock. May be classed by size as either Sand, Silt, or Clay.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

The Works Progress Administration (renamed in 1939 as the Work Projects Administration; WPA) was the largest and most ambitious New Deal agency, employing millions of unemployed people (mostly unskilled men) to carry out public works projects, including the construction of public buildings and roads. In much smaller but more famous projects the WPA employed musicians, artists, writers, actors and directors in large arts, drama, media, and literacy projects.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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