



Sacramento Archeological Society, Inc.

Newsletter

www.sacarcheology.org

September/October - 2010

Message from SAS President John Foster

Paisley Caves, Presumptions and Prisoners

June 24-27 was a spectacular SAS tour of archaeology and history in SE Oregon and NE California. The group was led (if it can be) by Dennis and Marty, who did the advance work and lined up fantastic points of interest along the way. Many thanks to them for allowing the rest of us to tag along and enjoy the beautiful scenery and think about the ancient past.

We began with a tour of Paisley Caves, a series of shallow rock shelters above the shore of a dry Pleistocene lake some 40 minutes north of Lakeview, Oregon. Dr. Dennis Jenkins of the University of Oregon has been excavating there each of the last 4 seasons and has recovered evidence of human occupation dating to 14,300 B.P. (before present 1950). He met us at his site and gave us an extensive tour while students continued to excavate the deep units. The Paisley Caves site is currently the oldest dated human presence in North America. Paisley Caves were occupied before Clovis hunters were taking down mammoths, so it is now clear that the makers of spectacular fluted points were NOT the first people on this continent.



Paisley Caves are a series of shallow shelters carved into a basalt uplift by an ancient lake. When the lake level dropped, they became shelters for human occupants. The University of Oregon team has carefully excavated deep archaeological deposits. A human coprolite was discovered while we were there!!

As explained by Dr. Jenkins, the evidence at Paisley comes mostly from human coprolites. Over 100 have been found so far. These have been well preserved in the deep rocky sediments and have allowed for 14C analysis as well as DNA extraction. A great deal of information is being assembled about these ancient lake-dwellers in spite of the scarcity of stone tools from the earliest levels.



Dr. Dennis Jenkins explains stratigraphy of the deposits at Paisley Caves to our SAS tour. It was a spectacular setting.

We archaeologists had been taught (and it's in all our North American Archaeology textbooks) that Clovis was the first culture to follow big game herds into North America - about 11,000 to 11,500 years ago. Anything earlier was considered a "crackpot" theory - to be rejected rather quickly. There are crackpots out there, but Paisley teaches an important lesson. We were guilty of not looking beyond Clovis because Clovis was first. That defined the universe; why look beyond? Nothing there. Well, crow tastes okay when properly prepared and so does the harsh reality of a human time in North America before Clovis. It must have been a harsh living - a cold, wet and fearsome environment dominated by megafauna and ice. How did these Paisley people survive? At this point we don't know, but this can't be the only place they occupied. Other sites must now be reexamined and further details teased out of the ancient archaeological deposits. The "Clovis-first" theory is now shattered and we presume there are earlier sites out there to discover and document.

Our SAS tour also took in Petroglyph Point and Captain Jack's stronghold at Lava Beds National Monument. These are awe-inspiring sites. Our group included Rick Fitzgerald,

who directed some of the archaeological surveys at Lava Beds when he worked for NPS, so we were able to see some little-known gems of ancient times.

Important sites and historical events have a way of intersecting, as was the case on our tour. One of our stops was at the Tule Lake Relocation Center, where Japanese-Americans were rounded up after Pearl Harbor and interned. Tule Lake was the harshest of these camps. It was an American Concentration Camp where families were held under guard and dissidents were jailed and beaten by guards. Their crime? Being of Japanese ancestry.

Looking back on these events after 70 years, it is hard to understand what led to the incarceration of US citizens. A few years ago I had the opportunity to see a shipwreck that played an important role in this sad history.

The Montebello was a 400-foot oil tanker steaming north with a full cargo in late December, 1941. Six miles offshore from Cambria she ran out of a fog bank into a clearing and found itself off the bow of a Japanese submarine.



The Union Oil Company tanker Montebello. It's sinking two weeks after Pearl Harbor led to the relocation of Japanese-Americans.

The sub fired a torpedo striking the Montebello in the bow; the ship sank in 11 minutes.

The crew of 31 scrambled into lifeboats, and was fired on by the sub's deck gun as they rowed into the fog. They made it to shore and spread the word that an invasion fleet was lurking off the California coast. An attack seemed eminent. President Roosevelt issued the Executive Order to relocate Japanese-Americans.



Giant anemones crowd the Montebello deck at a depth of 880 feet. The shipwreck sits upright on the bottom.

The Montebello lies upright on the bottom at a depth of 880 feet. Its tanks are still full of crude oil. They will need to be pumped out at some point to prevent an environmental disaster. In the mean time, the ship stands as a reminder of the terrible human cost of war and hatred.



In 2003 I had the opportunity to dive the Montebello with a NOAA expedition to search for signs of hull deterioration. What a thrill to descend to 880 feet in a 2-man sub!!

John W. Foster, SAS President

Paisley Caves and Modoc County Tour Reflections

As we reflect on the Paisley Caves and Modoc County Tour we can't believe how much ground and time we covered in four days; geology, pictographs, petroglyphs, wildlife, the Modoc War in the Lava Beds, the WWII Tule Lake Internment Camp, and much, much more. From 14,300 years ago at the Paisley Caves to present day preservation of artifacts and history by small but important museums.

We were most excited about having the opportunity to visit the Paisley Caves and meet archeologist Dennis Jenkins. His presentation to us, while standing in the current digging site, made us realize how much effort goes into a landmark dig such as this. He led us through the several years of excavating the caves and how much rework was required to make sure that the DNA tests on the coprolites were accurate and could stand up to worldwide scrutiny by fellow archeologists. The presentation covered such a wide area of archeology that it was like the academic environment one would find in most college settings. We went away with a greater appreciation for the dirty work, time, money and science required for such a dig. Dennis expressed the foresight he maintains in how far to go with the current technology and how much to leave to future digs when the technology may be able to tell much more about the inhabitants of these caves and their daily life.

Carolyn McGregor, SAS Board member

UPCOMING EVENTS

"Retrospective"

Bob Leach, SAS Member

November / December 2010

Park Gallery @ 2673 21st St. Sacramento

11:00 am to 3:00 pm

SAS member Bob Leach will be having a retrospective of his career as an artist and teacher during the months of November and December, 2010. The venue is the Park Gallery located at 2673 21st Street in Sacramento. The gallery faces Freeport Blvd. Mr. Leach' work will be available for your viewing pleasure and for sale. The gallery hours are 11:00 a.m. through 3:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. Specific dates in November and December are yet to be set; Mr. Leach expects the opening to be the second Saturday in November.

The SAS Annual Meeting for 2010 and Presentation

by

Breck Parkman

California State Park Senior Archaeologist

Saturday, December 4, 2010

2:00 –5:00 pm

at

Vallejo's Restaurant

1100 O St., #8

Sacramento, CA 95814

Mark your calendar for this event. Following Brent Parkman's presentation and a brief Annual Meeting, a Mexican buffet will be served to current members of SAS who have paid in advance for their meal. Further details will be in the Nov/Dec 2010 Newsletter.