

DIRTY DIGS: 2009

August 14, 2009

As everyone might have heard, Pasadena City College has been facing a few drawbacks recently, including budget cuts, and proposed cancellations of certain classes and programs, of which have resulted in conflicting reactions among students and staff. The Milford Archaeological Research Institution (M.A.R.I) field class, Anthropology 30H, was one of the programs discussed for discontinuation, leaving many disheartened. Despite such unfortunate circumstances, thanks to instructors Mari Pritchard Parker and Dr. Lauren Arenson, as well as other individuals, the field class for the summer 2009 held strong, and remained a program available to those students interested.

This summer, students departed for Utah on June 22, 2009. The program is a two-week session, ending July 5, 2009. Many students signed up for the field school, including both new and returning applicants, as well as volunteer workers, for a total of twenty-five?. The names of all attendees are as follows: Instructor Mari Pritchard Parker, Gregario Pacheco, Yvonne Verser, Omar Rice, Whitney Jacobs, Steve Stacey, Julie Lau, Aimee Lee Van Havermaat, Nicole Ibarra, Marisol Espino, Melanie Beth, Joy Batty, Casey Shaeffer, Nishita Lal, Laura Alvarenga, Mark King, Jairo Avila, Iris Flores, Thomas Zimmerman, Elizabeth Xintarianos, Alice Okimura, Oliver (last name?), Victor (last name?), Priscilla Cejudo, and Alexander Scalia.

Thank you to the hard work of volunteers, efforts to build a cabin in time for the field school, and other preparations necessary, were successful. Much thanks to Dr. Jeanne Binning, who lectured and demonstrated the art of flint-knapping and debitage analysis, and to Steve Stacey who worked with students on surveying and site mapping.

Upon arrival on the Monday of the twenty-second of June, after a long and tiring drive to Milford, students and staff unpacked and settled into their new home. This year, members of the program camped at the M.A.R.I dig site. The day following arrival would consist of unpacking and preparing equipment to begin excavation efforts.

When some individuals hear the term, archaeology, they tend to have a common misconception that archaeology is just about digging in the dirt and the discovery of dinosaur remains. However, they are unaware that the practice of archaeology is much, much, more than that. In order to succeed in the field, one must know the ethics and values of archaeology. In addition, an extensive knowledge of history, pre-history, and geology is essential. When preparing a site, it is key to know the topography of the land, and careful precautions and measurements must be taken into consideration. Surveying the site is necessary, before any excavation efforts can begin. The technique requires much skill, since trigonometric calculations are the root of the method. When preparing a unit, the datum point of the entire site, as well as of the unit, must be established. Prior to digging, drawings and mappings of the site and units are required. Throughout the process, all found artifacts, ecofacts, etc. must be documented, and all necessary paperwork completed, in order to ensure proper methodology. Excavation this year consisted of six, 1m x 1m units, with a depth goal of reaching 100 cm, digging levels of 10cm at a time. Since the entire site had already been surface collected previously, the focus would be the levels following.

Some exciting finds included partial and complete projectile points made of obsidian and chert, two beads, one of which contained thin ridges on the outer later, and some ceramic pottery sherds. Aside from digging, students and staff visited a number of historical and prehistorical locations. These included the Fremont Museum, Pavante Butte, Southern Utah University Repository, Cedar Breaks, Parowan Gap, Baker Village, Frisco Ghost Town, and Lehman Caves. The number of days for digging was limited; only six full days, since time was shortened due to unforeseen circumstances—mainly in the forces of Mother Nature: rain and dust storms were to blame. Other days were spent on lab work. Regardless, students were still able to reach a depth of 100 cm in their units.

After a hard days work, the campfire was the source of relaxation for most. Smores and stories allowed for bonding and soon-to-be memories.

At the close of the excavation on July 3, 2009, a potluck dinner taking place that evening would mark the official ending of the trip.

Some students, along with Instructor Mari Pritchard, took part in the exciting Milford Fourth of July Celebration Parade, the day after.

Despite a few obstacles and challenges, the M.A.R.I 2009 Field School was an overall success. No matter what the case may be, and no matter the experiences, one thing is for certain: the time spent together will always be remembered. Moments were created into memories, and these memories will last a lifetime. Although the future of the M.A.R.I field school is unknown, we can only hope that this wonderful program may continue to be an option for those interested in archaeology. Not only does the program provide an opportunity to experience the field of archaeology, it also teaches individuals the values of hard work and appreciation.