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Breaking New Ground: A Story of Native American Archaeologists Working in Their Ancestral Lands

Film written and directed by Phil Gross; produced by Kelly R. McGuire; William Hildebrandt and D. Craig Young, associate producers. Copyright Cinnabar Video and Far Western Archaeological Research Group, Inc., 2014. Running time: 32 minutes. (Price free, view at <http://farwestern.com/breaking-new-ground/>)

Reviewed by Peter A. Nelson
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Breaking New Ground is an informative, enjoyable, and inspiring film about the experiences of 42 Native American people who were hired in 2010 to work as archaeological field technicians on the Ruby Pipeline Project. This film opens with a Paiute prayer recited by Tribal Elder Ralph Burns, who says that we have much to be thankful for. Among many other things, we can be thankful for the archaeologists and Native American people who came before us and worked so diligently to strengthen relationships between researchers, agencies, and descendant communities. In the case of the Ruby Pipeline Project, field technicians from the local Paiute and Shoshone tribes worked with Far Western Anthropological Research Group to study over 600 archaeological sites in tribal ancestral territories that stretch from Opal, Wyoming to Malin, Oregon. This case as presented in the film is a laudable example of how archaeological consulting firms can leverage their resources in development projects to make the profession of Cultural Resource Management (CRM) archaeology more inclusive of descendant communities. In the following sections of this review, I will describe the various sections of the film and offer my thoughts about the various themes that the film presents.

The film, *Breaking New Ground*, is organized into four sections that each represent a different aspect of the Native American field technicians' experiences working on the Ruby Pipeline Project: "Hired," "Fieldwork," "Finding Your Past," and "Offering Respect." In the first section, "Hired," the Native American field technicians are introduced. They share information about their diverse backgrounds and upbringings in rural and urban settings, as well as their perceptions of archaeology before

working on the project. Many of the newly-hired field technicians were skeptical about archaeology, because archaeology has often privileged information-gathering through the destructive study of cultural resources rather than avoiding and preserving those resources in place.

The next two sections of the film, "Fieldwork" and "Finding Your Past," give viewers a sense of what archaeological work is like in the Great Basin. This beautiful and rugged territory challenged field technicians with snowy winters and blistering-hot summers but also provided a place for building interpersonal relationships and sharing knowledge with other crew members. In addition to building new relationships with people, many field technicians reaffirmed and strengthened their connections to ancestral items and places through their work, recalling the masterfully-shaped mortar bowls and projectile points as well as the places where they could feel their ancestors around them.

In the fourth section, "Offering Respect," field technicians talk about the precautions they take when working in the field to ensure their safety, spiritually and physically. The film then transitions into a short historical overview of the tenuous relationships between Native Americans and archaeologists and how new legislation is making the discipline more inclusive. The Native American field technicians themselves speak highly of archaeology at this point in the film, completing a personal narrative arc in the film that mirrors the broader historic trajectory of Native American-archaeologist relationships moving from a place of exclusion and distrust toward a place of inclusivity and understanding.

While it is true that relationships between Native Americans and archaeologists are getting better overall, the personal narrative arc of field technicians from untrained and skeptical of archaeology to trained and supportive of archaeology at times feels too oversimplified and optimistic. Without further contextualization, general viewers of this film may come away with the misconception that Native Americans' distrust of archaeology stems mainly from a lack of education about archaeology rather than from completely different sets of cultural values and knowledge concerning heritage preservation that are just as well-informed as Western scientific values and knowledge systems. In viewing this section of the film, I wonder how tribal employees and cultural resource professionals involved in the project would have

responded to the same questions as the Native American field technicians in the film.

Despite this one critique, the film ends on a high note with a wonderful story told by Diane Teeman (Northern Paiute), demonstrating her understanding of situated knowledges even though she may not be aware of this term or its use in feminist theories. Teeman describes blind men in a room who need to rely on each other to describe different parts of a whole object in order to arrive at the conclusion that it is an elephant. As Teeman states "...science has an interpretation, tribes have an interpretation. We know what things are, you know, but other people have a different idea of what they are, and that's their belief. And I think us all talking together and collaborating, we can get a bigger picture of reality and our knowledge of what this world is." No one in Teeman's story is asking anyone else to wholly take on his/her perspective. Rather, the story encourages everyone hearing it to be open to the possibility that each one of us only knows and understands partial truths. We can work together and support and learn from each other. In doing so, we will deepen our understandings of each other and our respective and collective histories on this planet.

As George Nicholas (2010:13) states in his edited volume, *Being and Becoming Indigenous Archaeologists*,

there is much value for Indigenous persons entering this profession in knowing that other Indigenous persons have struggled and succeeded in being archaeologists. For non-Indigenous people, these narratives bring to light the obstacles that Indigenous people face in the discipline and raise awareness as to why accommodations are necessary to make the discipline more inclusive of Native American people. As a young Native American person pursuing a profession in archaeology, I find it immensely encouraging to hear the stories of both hardships and successes in *Breaking New Ground*, and it strengthens my resolve to find my place in a discipline that is simultaneously frustrating and rewarding, physically and mentally challenging, not traditional in my tribal culture, and yet very necessary to learn. It is our responsibility as Native American people to be the stewards of those who came before us, learning and using every tool at our disposal, because the old people are the ones who got us where we are today. *Breaking New Ground* encourages us to do just that.

REFERENCE

- Nicholas, George P.
2010 *Being and Becoming Indigenous Archaeologists*.
Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.



The Fifth Beginning: What Six Million Years of Human History Can Tell Us About Our Future

Robert L. Kelly,
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016,
168 pp., ISBN 9780520293120, \$24.95 (hardcover).

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Readers of this journal will be familiar with at least some elements of Robert Kelly's professional record: archaeological work in North America, ethnography on Madagascar, discourse on archaeological practice, and *The Foraging Spectrum*, his widely cited synthesis of

hunter-gatherer ethnology. Here he draws on some of this background in a project of the sort many of us tout as important, but few undertake in any serious way—an effort to explore the relevance of lessons learned from the study of the human past to the looming challenges of rapid environmental and socio-economic change, phrased in terms accessible to a non-specialist audience.

Kelly begins with a short statement about the advantages and disadvantages of an archaeological perspective—the grand temporal and spatial scale of inquiry versus the limits inherent in reliance on material evidence of past human behavior, not every aspect of which has a tangible correlate. These limits can be offset by reference to a theoretical perspective that enables analysts to anticipate and develop potentially testable