

UC Merced

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology

Title

Archaeology and the Public: Future Directions

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6nt1v894>

Journal

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 14(1)

ISSN

0191-3557

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Publication Date

1992-07-01

Peer reviewed

Archaeology and the Public: Future Directions¹

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WHEN asked to take a retrospective and prospective look at the state of Great Basin archaeology *vis-à-vis* the public it was clear that the scope and dimensions of such an endeavor could quickly escalate to unmanageable proportions. In this paper, I will focus on what I see as positive efforts that have been employed to include the public in what it is we do and the hurdles we need to overcome to realign our priorities. I then turn to the future and where we ought to think about going in the next decade. I hope that the following comments will be more than preaching to the converted. In recent years, the discipline of archaeology has been transformed at least in its rhetoric as far as public outreach and education initiatives are concerned. Whether that conversion will translate into genuine, on-the-ground efforts remains to be seen.

PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY: WHAT IS IT?

Archaeologists have defined “public archaeology” in many ways. Each of us carries an idea as to what should be subsumed under the term. For some public archaeology is simply publicly funded archaeology. In today’s world that means most archaeology if we include cultural resource management, which is ultimately tied to the regulatory requirements of government. For others, public archaeology means the involvement of avocational archaeologists in a variety of tasks. My intent here is to include public archaeology under a much more inclusive umbrella. I view it as both active involvement by the public (excavations, lab work, etc.) and passive involvement (site visitation,

site stewardship, classroom instruction, voluntarism, and yes, 1040 forms—tax-payers’ dollars). The point is that passively or actively, willingly or not, all Americans contribute to public archaeology. The boundaries between publicly involved and publicly excluded archaeology are certainly grayer and more blurred than a generation ago. We can all point to projects that have been aided by volunteer labor, site monitors, and tour guides. Not infrequently, avocational archaeologists form the bulk or even all of a project’s field or laboratory personnel. This is an important and positive development. While, ironically, it is those rare projects where tax dollars are not involved, such as National Geographic Society sponsored research, that frequently gain the widest dissemination and/or participation by the public, tax-funded programs deserve, and yes, *require* public involvement, participation, and scrutiny.

A CASE HISTORY

To set the stage for future directions of public involvement in archaeology, I will first outline our experience in the Carson City Bureau of Land Management (BLM) District and then draw from examples elsewhere. The following is a chronology of development of the cultural resources management program in the Carson City BLM District (I draw most heavily from our experiences there not because it is unique, but because it is the effort with which I have greatest familiarity). The management program in the Carson City District focuses on the Grimes Point Archaeological Area.

The Grimes Point Archaeological Area was formally established in 1976. The area encompassed by Grimes Point is coterminous with the area of the Carson Sink that was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. When BLM began serious management of the Grimes Point region in the mid-1970s, it was decided that listing on the National Register should be something more than another paperwork exercise. Grimes Point had already been fenced and cleaned (having been used as a dump for awhile), but we wanted a listing to lead to positive and creative management of the site, not just inventory and "storage."

Therefore, when we wrote the Grimes Point Management Plan in 1977, we not only solicited comment from professionals, but also invited school age children to the Grimes Point Area in order to gain sensitivity to their interests and concerns. Following the creation of a management plan, the Grimes Point Petroglyph Trail was designed and constructed, with labor supplied by Youth Conservation Corps crews. This had the double advantage of being low-cost and involving local teenagers who gained a sense of pride and responsibility for the area. Interpretive signs and a brochure were also incorporated into the site. Artwork, text, and design were all done in-house to minimize costs. Total cost for this portion of development was less than \$5000. To date, over 100,000 visitors have hiked the Grimes Point Trail.

While establishing this trail was an important step, we still wanted to take a more proactive stance in encouraging the study of prehistory. Therefore, in 1978, four self-contained portable study kits of Nevada prehistory were designed and constructed in-house. These study kits included a slide program, and were aimed at a grammar school audience. The kits were distributed to local school districts for use by any teacher wishing to incorporate prehistory into the classroom; there are several teachers in the Washoe County School District who con-

tinue to use these kits on a regular basis.

The following year, the American Museum of Natural History and the BLM entered into a cooperative agreement to re-excavate Hidden Cave. Located a short distance north of Grimes Point, Hidden Cave had been excavated once in 1940 by S.M. Wheeler and again in 1951 by Gordon Grosscup and Norman Roust. These excavations were never published. Although easy entrance to Hidden Cave was prevented by the locked gate installed by Wheeler, vandals continued to thwart efforts to protect the site. The BLM decided that the only way to save the site was to excavate it. Led by David Hurst Thomas, the American Museum of Natural History excavated the cave in 1979 and 1980; the strategy and results of this two year project are documented elsewhere (Hatoff and Thomas 1982, 1985; Thomas 1985). It is important to note that this project involved the participation of many groups and organizations. Unlike many CRM projects, and in keeping with our self-imposed educational mandate, the local community was directly involved in all phases of the Hidden Cave project. At the outset a conscious decision was made to maximize publicity about the excavation. As a result, over 1,200 visitors took advantage of formal on-site tours in 1979 and 1980. The extraordinary public interest in the project persuaded us that Hidden Cave held the potential to be an interpretive and educational centerpiece long after the excavations had ended. Therefore, in 1981, a management plan was developed for on-site interpretation of the cave.

In 1982, in-house personnel designed and constructed the interpretive facility in six months. Much of the interpretive artwork and ancillary design was completed by Dennis O'Brien, a staff artist from the American Museum of Natural History. A permanent sister exhibit was also established at the Churchill County Museum in Fallon. Since its opening in 1982, over 16,000 people have

participated in the tour program—a number that has exceeded our most optimistic estimates.

In 1983, the Carson City BLM District entered into a cooperative management agreement with the Churchill County Museum Association to conduct regularly scheduled weekend public tours of the site utilizing trained volunteer guides. BLM personnel conduct week day tours. The primary users during the week-day are school groups. In many schools, the Hidden Cave tour is now an integrated part of the curriculum. The BLM now averages 80 week-day tours per year with schools as far as 100 miles away participating in the program. Recognizing the continuing and ever-increasing demand for tours at the cave, the Carson City BLM District hired a full-time interpretive specialist in 1991 to accommodate this interest and work closely with the Churchill County Museum to enlist and train new volunteer tour guides.

Encouraged by the success of the Hidden Cave Program and spurred on by the late Mary Lou Murphy, a teacher in the Washoe county School District, a committee was formed with representatives from the BLM, the Nevada State Museum, the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office, the University of Nevada–Reno, and the Washoe County School District to explore the feasibility of establishing a simulated dig facility. Numerous simulated digs had already been conducted by the Carson City BLM District for local schools, but this committee was charged with constructing a permanent facility. In 1989, this program came to fruition with the construction and implementation of the Great Basin Archaeological Experience (GBAE), based at the Verdi Elementary School in its outdoor education area. BLM archaeologists train teachers to utilize the facility. In its first year of operation, approximately 20 classes used the facility. The GBAE is now becoming another component of an integrated archaeological curricula in western Nevada schools, one that includes the Churchill County Museum, the

Grimes Point Petroglyph Trail, and Hidden Cave.

The entire cost for all of the programs discussed above comes to less than \$150,000. In other words, for less than the cost of a modest CRM contract we have been able to reach an enormous audience in a very direct and personal manner. It is important to stress that the only *positive* exposure to cultural resources and their management an individual receives might be while participating in one of these programs.

There are a refreshing number of programs elsewhere in the west that directly involve the public in an immediate and profound manner. In Oregon, the BLM-sponsored Operation SAVE (Save Archaeological Values for Everyone) is an innovative marriage of cultural resources management, law enforcement and public affairs. This three pronged effort focuses on enforcement of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, public education and outreach in the form of school presentations and extensive use of media and employee training within the agency. Operation SAVE has now merged with the Bureau's regional and national initiative, "Adventures in the Past," that in many ways mirrors Operation SAVE. The Lakeview BLM District, in partnership with the High Desert Museum, has developed both stationary and mobile exhibits that have been viewed by a large audience. One of these innovative exhibits includes a trunk filled with items typically associated with a mid-19th century immigrant to the west. Children are given the challenging task of "lightening the load." This interactive experience teaches concepts in material culture and the formation of the archaeological record.

In collaboration with professionals, avocational archaeologists in Arizona have developed a highly successful Archaeology Awareness Week that draws many participants from the general public. Prehistoric technology demonstrations and public participation on digs are key components of the program. Through public

awareness programs, Charles Redman has convinced developers to incorporate archaeological research into their development plans and in so doing has prevented the destruction of, or mitigated impacts to, sites that were not protected by federal legislation.

Farther afield, but increasingly relevant to this discussion, is Christopher Hanks' and David Pokotylo's innovative involvement of Native Americans in Northwest Territories archaeology (Hanks and Pokotylo 1989). Essentially the focus of research has shifted from Native Americans as objects of inquiry to inquirers. Hanks and Pokotylo have established a working partnership whereby Native American communities participate in decisions about cultural remains. These decisions are made not in a way that has stifled traditional research, but which has instead led to new insights for both the anthropologists and Native American collaborators.

All of these programs were achieved with little fanfare or expense. They were accomplishments that directly reflect the dedication and enthusiasm of the proponents and participants. In the past year virtually every issue of National Park Service's *CRM Bulletin* and *Federal Archaeology Report* has been heavily devoted to public education and public involvement in archaeology. Those who attended the 1988 Society for American Archaeology (SAA) meeting know that much of the focus there was on these same issues. It is gratifying to see this nascent and long overdue awareness; unfortunately, it may be targeted to the wrong audience. While it may be "politically correct" to talk about greater public outreach and participation within the discipline, it is quite another thing to put these words into action. How do we accomplish this?

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN ARCHAEOLOGY

First let me outline what we do not need to do. We do not need another committee to tell

us that we need public involvement. We do not need another SAA newsletter telling us the same. We do not need another conference expending thousands of dollars in travel funds to talk to each other. Many have already addressed the pertinent issues and offered viable steps to remedy the situation (e.g., Fagan 1984). We are now at a juncture where the bureaucratic infrastructure itself requires an overhaul.

We can immediately rectify certain conditions by changing the structure of CRM and CRM contracting. By requiring a 10 percent set aside in each contract with the requirement of a public involvement component we can begin to redress some of the past deficiencies. Such things as mandatory nontechnical publications, public participation days on CRM-sponsored digs and surveys, and off-site and on-site interpretive facilities are all things that could be done with these funds. For those CRM projects that are not particularly amenable to public involvement, we might consider "set asides" to be pooled and used for entirely new projects that could address both research and public needs. These projects would actively incorporate public participation. For those contractors uncomfortable with such programs—well, it's a competitive market out there. Those willing and able to take on such tasks will survive. These admonitions equally apply to archaeologists in the public sector. There is no reason why a project sponsored by the National Science Foundation should not incorporate a public involvement component.

In an even more radical departure from today's norm, I propose that we eliminate, or greatly modify how we do entire classes of CRM undertakings. As part of this restructuring we should consider minimizing the project review functions of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) in some instances. While the ACHP frequently plays an invaluable role in the Section 106 process and related compliance issues, there are times when

ACHP oversight represents a cumbersome and unnecessary tier of review. The Section 106 process is usually more effectively handled by those most familiar with local issues and conditions. I find it odd that we, as a discipline, have allowed the creation of a bureaucratic structure that relies on individuals located thousands of miles away from an area—not necessarily familiar with the local prehistory, history, or relevant issues—to be pivotal in the decisions on how sites are eventually managed. This is not meant to imply, however, that simple geographic proximity always engenders better input from a SHPO. I am sure many of us can cite examples where a SHPO review has inspired a prompt consultation with the ACHP in the hope of bringing a dispassionate or more realistic resolution to a particular issue. The Nevada BLM, Nevada SHPO, and ACHP recently entered into a programmatic agreement that begins to address these very concerns by localizing and streamlining the “determination of effect” process so that the BLM and SHPO do not need to involve the ACHP in most instances. This is a step in the right direction.

In lieu of not doing certain inventories that have a statistically demonstrable potential to yield little or no meaningful information, I suggest we surcharge the applicant by means of a standardized formula, with the accrued funds to be pooled and utilized in a competitively awarded program to implement a handful of high quality undertakings that truly achieve the goals of contemporary archaeology and public involvement. In a sense this would be an NSF-like funding initiative derived from and for the benefit of CRM and the public, while at the same time relieving land use applicants from CRM undertakings of limited potential (we can all cite examples of limited potential exercises—surveys of paved roads, endless analyses of tin can scatters, agonizing over three isolated flakes—whatever happened to our anthropological underpinnings?). The question of what can

be *a priori* eliminated or retained is not easily resolved and is subject to abuses. Perhaps as a middle-of-the-road compromise those areas where inventory data are insufficient to make statistically valid assessments could be subjected to less than Class III (100% coverage) inventories. If the results of those surveys indicate an absence or low probability of significant cultural resources the land use applicant could then be absolved of further CRM responsibilities and pay into the pooled fund program. By doing this we would create a win-win situation. The applicant will save time and money by not bearing the costs for a complete inventory. We as a discipline acquire a new source of funding. Mechanisms would need to be established to ensure “equal access” to these funds. Quite frankly, I would rather see five well-done projects whose anthropologically meaningful results are widely disseminated than 100 projects none of which is seen by more than a dozen individuals.

Almost two decades have passed since the publication of Charles McGimsey’s seminal work *Public Archaeology* (McGimsey 1972). Today, more than ever, his words ring true:

Archaeologists, amateur and professional, cannot expect others to preserve the nation’s heritage if we, who by interest or training are best qualified in the field, do not assume a role of positive leadership and public education [McGimsey 1972:4].

It is my own position that public involvement is not an addendum, an afterthought, or a luxury. It is the foundation of tomorrow’s archaeology. More than ever, a public-professional partnership is needed. Without an informed and interested public we have no constituency other than ourselves. With a commitment by the professional community at all levels, as well as some achievable infrastructural changes, we can reach the common goal of managing the resource base in a fashion that is mutually beneficial for all. Many have spent

long hours already doing what is being called for here, and to those individuals, we collectively salute you. You are proof that there is really nothing arcane or terribly daunting about what is needed—we just need to do it.

NOTE

1. This paper was originally presented at the Plenary Session of the 1990 Great Basin Anthropological Conference in Reno, Nevada when the author was employed in the public sector. Now employed in the private sector, the opinions expressed in this paper remain unchanged.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my appreciation to Charlotte Beck, Robert Elston, Catherine Fowler, Robert Kautz, Kelly McGuire, Sally Morgan, Lori Pendleton and David Thomas for reviewing earlier drafts of this paper. Their thoughtful comments were most helpful.

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