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EDITORIALS

ERRATUM . . . We hereby acknowledge an error of omission in the April issue of this journal: Volume I, Number 4. The illustrations for the article by Mrs. Elizabeth W. Crozer Campbell: *Archaeological Problems in the Southern California Deserts*, Plates 20–27, inclusive, are reproductions of photographs by Arnold of Pasadena, California. For this erratum we offer our sincere apology to Mrs. Campbell and the photographer.

DESTRUCTIVE FIELD WORK . . . To a majority of the students of American archaeology, the arrival of spring and summer brings with it a pleasurable hope for, or anticipation of field activities. Human curiosity, the ultimate source of science, and the lure of the outdoors combine to create within one's mind an urge, comparable to an itch, to probe after additional, possibly new information regarding the cultural peculiarities and the history of the preliterate Americans.

This urge is in itself quite worthy and entirely understandable. It can do no harm and may result in much that is good if controlled by an intelligent policy. If not so controlled, it can lead to no end of disastrous damage to the cause of archaeology. Training and experience are required to guide activities motivated by this urge into productive rather than destructive channels. The untrained man can no more expect to excavate a mound or a village site with praiseworthy results than he could hope, without proper instruction, to successfully operate for appendicitis.

To start at the very beginning, there is an incorrect and a correct attitude towards field work: that of the man who seeks "relics" for commercial profit or for his own collections, without a thought of searching for knowledge, is as incorrect as it is lamentable; that of the man who sincerely seeks to add to the available store of information, whether in measure large or minutely small, is manifestly the correct one. Presumably, all students of American archaeology, whether specialists or non-specialists, professionals or amateurs, possess the cor-

rect research attitude. It does not follow, however, that all students are familiar with proper technical methods for field research.

To illustrate, it is probably true that a large majority of the mounds in the Mississippi Valley that have been entered, regardless of by whom, have been subjected to such careless methods of excavation and data recording that practically nothing of true scientific value has, as a result, been added to our information. To quote from a recent publication on the situation in one state:

"I believe I am safe in saying, however, that these pioneers accomplished almost nothing to warrant our gratitude. So far as I have been able to learn, no records were kept of their excavations. Their work did not even approach the standards of modern archaeological methods; and their collections are of little value to the modern student, inasmuch as there is no indication as to where, when, and how the various items in the collections were obtained. They are interesting to look at and to know that they were made by Indians; but it is impossible to use them in deciphering the course of events in prehistoric Missouri."¹

It might be added that the methods employed in much of this work were such that many important data could not possibly have been preserved against destruction. The cause of this wholesale loss to science of important information was either an unscientific attitude, resulting in methods prohibitive to the preservation of facts, or of faulty methods not permitting of a careful determining or accurate recording of data.

No student of American archaeology desires to lose or destroy facts relating to the story of preliterate man on these continents, nor would he wilfully run the risk of so doing. To a certain degree all students, including specialists, are in the same boat. It is highly doubtful if any existing research methods may be described as perfect. Improved details are constantly being inaugurated. It is incumbent upon all research students, no matter how thorough their training, or extensive their experience, to constantly exert every effort to improve technical methods. It follows that it is of relatively superlative importance that students untrained and without qualifying experience should not engage in independent ventures in field excavations. The "should not" in the preceding sentence does not reflect some arbitrary rule imposed upon common folks by self-appointed members of an archaeological brain trust, but rather a self-imposed rule dictated by the sincerity of one's interest in the progressive welfare of archaeology.

¹ Berry, J. Brewton, *Archaeological Resources and Research in Missouri*, Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1936.

It may be contended that, since one is not born with experience, a student has no opportunity to follow the dictates of his interests into the field. How is one to acquire experience? The question, a perfectly legitimate one, is easily answered; field parties under qualified directors not infrequently seek the services of inexperienced students, and worth while experience may be best acquired under the personal supervision of trained and experienced field investigators.

The season with its accompanying urge is here. Are your sincere interests in American archaeology sufficient to dictate for you the wise policy necessary to regulate your conduct along lines parallel to the best interests of your chosen science?

WCM.

POACHING ON FAMOUS SITES . . . The ability to resist the urge to excavate depends also upon the opportunities which circumstances offer. A flat plowed field on which flint implements and potsherds have been found is not hard to resist because of the absence of clues as to where to begin. A small mound or a partially exposed grave is much more enticing. The urge is always strong while visiting a locally famous site in which others have found interesting information in former years, or on a pilgrimage to some archaeological mecca such as Moundville, Cahokia, Fort Ancient, or the Mesa Verde, made famous by its spectacular character and historic significance. Fortunately many of these latter sites now are protected public parks or guarded by owners who understand their educational importance.

If the archaeologist, either professional or non-professional, is lured into "just prospecting around a bit" of a sunny afternoon, he may make quite a hole before he realizes, somewhat guiltily, that he has moved a quantity of earth.

The spot chosen in an attempt to satisfy personal curiosity contained the record of how its former occupants had lived. Now the record has been destroyed for the conditions in the deposits may have had more historic significance than the objects found. The obliteration of the record has certainly not been part of a carefully planned program of investigation. It is unlikely that the prospector is equipped with all the materials, ranging from a camera to notebooks and containers, required for an adequate transcription of the story. Probably he has neither the experience nor sufficient knowledge of the former culture to interpret accurately the evidence he has found and destroyed. The excitement of

discovery has passed, a fragment of history is gone forever, and only a vain regret remains.

The feeling of being a poacher is stronger if the student has been drawn into digging into a site being studied by another, and on which work has been stopped for a few days, or the entire season. No visitors, not even the most experienced excavator, who spends at the most only a few days at such a site, is able to translate the record he uncovers as completely as the man who has spent months in studying the conditions and in planning and executing an elaborate campaign of excavation. To the guilty feeling that a bit of history has been ruined which might have been recorded more accurately by another, is added the knowledge that the work of a colleague has been hampered, possibly seriously, in order to satisfy a personal whim.

No student of American archaeology desires to lose or destroy facts relating to the story of preliterate man on these continents, nor would he wilfully run the risk of so doing, by "just prospecting around a bit." Yet authoritative word has come that the Lindenmeier site in northern Colorado has been visited within the last few months by groups of "prospectors." On at least three occasions, groups of visitors said to be students and instructors from two or three of the educational institutions in that general region have been found digging at this site.

A chance to visit the Lindenmeier site and to be fortunate in finding a broken implement on the surface to treasure as a memento of the pilgrimage, is a natural and praiseworthy desire on the part of any archaeologist. This important site has become world famous because it is the only place so far discovered which was occupied by what is apparently one of the most ancient human groups in North America. Every student of American Indian history knows that this locality is still being excavated with the greatest of care by government archaeologists.

It seems incredible that students who are receiving training in archaeology, and who are, or should be, familiar with the attitude expressed in this editorial, have actually prospected in the deposits at the Lindenmeier site.

The season for archaeological field work is here. It is well to consider the possible results of one's studies and to regulate one's conduct in accordance with the best interests of American archaeology, so that there may be no personal or professional regrets.

CEG.

NON-DESTRUCTIVE RESEARCH . . . There are students who wish to acquire experience in field research but who have only an occasional week end, or similarly limited time period to devote to such work. For such students, service with an organized field party under competent direction would be entirely out of the question. There are, however, important and interesting varieties of research legitimately open to these students, involving work in both field and laboratory.

The success of surface survey in many districts is largely dependent upon the intermittent services of local amateur students. Any man with a heart for exploration would enjoy survey work, and it is of primary importance to all archaeologists. The work involves: the discovery and accurate recording of new sites, and of detailed features at a given site; the collecting and careful cataloguing of culture-indicative materials occurring on the surface at sites; and the recording of data from local collections of materials found at such sites. To this branch of activity may be added the endless opportunity for the study of materials and other data so collected.

These studies may center about such problems as: the mapping of sites and surface features at sites in the studied area; the geographical distribution of traits or trait complexes; the analysis of a certain class of materials, such as pottery; and laboratory experimentation in primitive sources and methods, possibly involving the reconstruction of methods and, in demonstration thereof, the reproduction of artifacts.

Many non-specialist students are now engaged in important research projects of this type, well within the scope of their training and experience. To the thorough enjoyment which they derive from this interesting work may be added the satisfaction of contributing thereby to the fund of knowledge available to archaeologists. How greatly this is to be preferred to the painful knowledge, or even possibility, that one's efforts have resulted in the destruction of information the value of which no one can ever definitely estimate.

WCM.