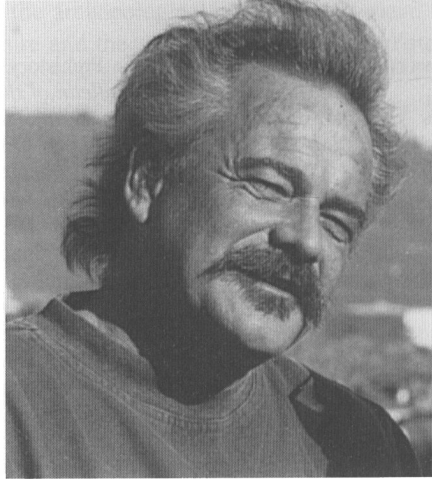


CHRISTOPHER RAVEN

1943–1994



Christopher Raven died on March 12, 1994, at the age of 50. He had been member of the Society for American Archaeology and an important contributor to western North American archaeology for nearly 30 years. A longer review of his life and work and a complete list of his publications will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology*.

Raven was born Christopher Robert Corson on October 27, 1943. He attended the University of California at Berkeley, graduating in 1966 and moving immediately to the doctorate program in anthropology. His principal supervisors were Robert Heizer and John Graham, his main research interest Mesoamerican archaeology. He read widely on the topic, took part in the 1968 Berkeley expedition to La Venta (Clewlow and Corson 1968), and traveled extensively in Yucatan and eastern Tabasco in connection with his dissertation research on Jaina figurines (Corson 1972).

Like others in his graduate cohort, Raven also worked in the western Great Basin. He spent three field seasons (1967–1969) with Richard Ambro and myself in northeastern California, running surveys and developing a basic chronological sequence. After a short stint of post-Ph.D. teaching at Berkeley, he returned to the area as staff archaeologist for the Bureau of Land Management's Susanville District. While serving in that post, he was instrumental in having large parts of the archaeologically important High Rock Canyon region of northern Nevada designated an "area of critical environmental concern" and, as such, protected from disruptive development. He was quietly proud of his role in this outcome.

In 1979 he met Shelly Cross, then a budding archaeologist/ethnographer working with various government agencies and Native American groups in the area. They were well matched, both personally

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and intellectually. After a two-year courtship, they married, adopted the surname Raven to mark the event, and began a five-year period of travel and research spanning four continents. Among the American highlights were field stints with Mike Moratto in the northern Sacramento Valley, Bob Bettinger in the White Mountains of eastern California, and Emma Lou Davis in Panamint Valley (Davis and Raven 1986; Raven 1984, 1985, 1986; Raven et al. 1984). They also conducted an ecological and ethnoarchaeological study of turtle and dugong hunters in the northern Torres Strait Islands that became the basis of Shelly's dissertation.

On returning from the Pacific in 1987, Raven took the position of senior staff archaeologist with Intermountain Research (IMR), a private archaeological practice in western Nevada. It was the beginning of the most intellectually productive period of his life. The firm favored projects that enabled staff to push the edge of the field, provided the necessary managerial framework to support them, and encouraged creativity. Raven fit well in this setting. His knowledge of ecological and economic theory, broad experience as archaeologist and ethnographer, sound analytic sense, and love of debate, arresting prose, and skill as an editor made him an instant and influential contributor.

His work on two projects was especially notable. The first was a six-year investigation of the massive Tosawih chert quarry, near Battle Mountain in northern Nevada. The site is famous in the Basin literature as the principal toolstone source for the ethnographic "White Knife" Shoshoni. IMR's research there is of special interest in that investigators used the basic framework of behavioral ecology to develop archaeologically testable predictions about many aspects of quarry-related behavior, including season of exploitation, site structure, and toolstone extraction and reduction tactics. It was the first time this theoretical perspective had ever been applied to lithics at so large a scale. Raven played a leading role in research design, contributed to the experiments that established the costs and benefits of alternative lithic extraction techniques, ran much of the fieldwork, conducted key analyses, wrote various reports, coedited one of three project summaries (Elston and Raven 1992), and organized an SAA symposium that reported overall project results (Elston and Raven 1991).

He was even more central to the second project, a long-term investigation of Stillwater Marsh, southeast of Reno. Record flooding in the mid-1980s had exposed scores of archaeological sites and hundreds of human burials over an area of several square miles. Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others, IMR conducted a preliminary investigation of the area (Raven and Elston 1988), then undertook the development of a predictive model of site distribution and assemblage composition. Raven used local soil maps as a basis for reconstructing local plant communities, calculated the potential costs and benefits of exploiting each community, appealed to simple models of diet and patch choice to predict actual patterns of exploitation and their archaeological consequences (Raven and Elston 1989), and conducted a preliminary archaeological test (Raven 1990). The closeness of the match between predicted and observed patterns surprised even Raven himself. The approach was developed further in subsequent work at Stillwater (Raven and Elston 1991), some of which Raven was still pursuing at the time of his death. This exercise remains one of the most comprehensive applications of optimal foraging theory to a problem in regional archaeology yet undertaken anywhere in the world.

It was through this work that Raven finally began to gain broad professional recognition. He was invited to conduct courses on research design, present the results of his work in university seminars, and assume editorial roles for scholarly journals. He appreciated the attention but was never really comfortable with the style of personal interaction that went with it. He preferred to work at a smaller, more intimate scale, leaving time to cultivate his other interests, particularly in music, literature, and film. He knew much about all of them, and greatly loved sharing that knowledge with his closest friends, a practice they in turn enjoyed and appreciated. His abrupt departure ended those conversations. Those of us who knew him well miss him very much.

JAMES F. O'CONNELL

Acknowledgments. Cashion Callaway, Robert Elston, and Ken Juell helped me prepare this piece. The photograph, courtesy the Division of Continuing Education, University of Nevada–Reno, shows Raven (left) and Elston somewhere in western Nevada, 1992. It was taken by Bill Germino.

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