

Amateur Avocational Archaeologist in Search of Alluring (Elusive) Artifacts
(Confessions of a Volunteer on the South Park Archaeology Project)

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I sometimes wonder if I'm pursuing this intense interest in archaeology too late in life. It seems that everyone but me has found a projectile point while on this survey. Can I use the excuse that my eye doc says I'm growing cataracts (which is why my 20-20 glasses don't give me 20-20 vision)? But, I'm not the only older person on the project (although maybe the oldest), so perhaps I don't have an excuse. Better late than never, I keep reassuring myself.

It was a rewarding day, I can tell you, when, on the last survey of the 2002 season, I found a large chalcedony biface. At least I thought it was a biface, and I kept praying that it was, because I had lagged behind the others and Tom had to come back a long ways to check it out. Whew! Great relief flooded over me when he confirmed the analysis and immediately found another, partially buried, biface nearby. Others came back to walk in ever widening circles around the original find, and, sure enough, there were flakes scattered over a fairly large area. Since this was the only yield in that day's survey, it was thought that perhaps this was a one-time-use site where hunting tools were made.

This season I've been silently chanting a mantra ("Today I will find a point!") as I endeavor to keep my place and match the uneven pace in the long, straggling survey line. I valiantly attempt to scan my assigned area to the right and left of my position, a distance of 10 meters (strikes me that it takes keener eyesight than I have!). It's often necessary to bend over or stoop down to examine a stone in order to determine if it's an artifact. Then I rise to find I'm behind the line again.

Don't laugh at the mantra bit. It has a good side benefit: it keeps me focused on the task at hand so that I'm not distracted by the pretty flowers and brightly colored stones that have no archaeological significance.

One of my favorite memory pictures is of more than 300 red, yellow and pink flags waving on a hillside, each marking one or more artifacts. This happened on a 2002 survey day in Threemile Gulch where almost every inch of ground was covered with petrified wood artifacts that called for flagging. High on the hillside we found huge petrified wood logs.



An interesting change of pace for me came this season (2003) when I helped with the



intensive surface collection and detailed mapping on Susan Bender's Threemile Gulch site, another high-density petrified wood site. Again there were hundreds of flags clustered in many 2-meter squares marked in a large area. Mostly on our knees, we measured the placement of each artifact in the square, mapped it on a graph, and placed it in a

bag with a card identifying its square. (Note: Less frustrating because the artifacts were identified by someone else and I didn't have to agonize over "is it or isn't it an artifact.")

I think everyone on this project cherishes a hope that we'll make a fantastic find and the evidence thus far uncovered lends credence to this hope: the approximately 7,000 year-old carbon date on the charcoal in a hearth at the Bender site; an isolated find of a possible Clovis point (more than 11,000 years ago) at the Columbine Ranch.



In the meantime, there's the thrill of the hunt, the thirst to connect with humans from an ancient time and learn more about their lifestyles. A side benefit is getting to do this in a setting



that demands an occasional moment of contemplation: the undulating hillocks, the ridges, the vast expanses of flatland, in a vast basin ringed by high mountains, where clouds provide an ever-changing scenic mood. Whether or not I find a point, it's all quite soul-satisfying.