HOUSTON ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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The Newsletter is published four times per year by the Houston Archeological Society. Contributions of news items, short articles and information of archeological significance should be sent to the Editor - Alan R. Duke, 1706 Oaks Drive, Pasadena, Texas 77502.

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New officers recently elected 1973-74 are as follows:

Chairman - Alexander Macnab, 6023 Portal, Houston, Texas 77024

Sec.-Treas. - Shirley Thompson, 3816 Ruskin, Houston, Texas 77005

Directors - David Salzar - Leland Patterson - Barbara Kuether

Nominating Committee for the new slate of officers included Bill McClure, Elaine Burleigh and David Salzar.

Our sincere thanks for a job well done to the officers who guided the Society thru the past year - David Salzar, Barbara Kuether, Bill McClure, Elaine Burleigh and Tom Cobb.

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Past and Future Programs - 1973

May - Lou Fullen discussed the Orcoquiza Indians of Southeast Texas.

June - Harry J. Shafer, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Texas A&M University, spoke on Caddoan Lithic Technology at the George C. Davis site.

July - David Salzar led a discussion and slide show on the Texas Archeological Society's 1973 Summer Field School held near Waco.

August - Elaine Burleigh presented a slide show of Mayan and Olmec sites visited by Elaine and Shirley Thompson on their most recent trip.

September - Jay Sharp presented a session on Archeological Reporting.

October - To be announced.

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News From HAS Members

Dr. Frank Soday is engaged in the excavation and restoration of a ruined temple (Ca 1000 AD) in Thailand.

R. L. Gregg was residing in 's Gravenhage, Netherlands, as of his July 16 letter and is getting acquainted with Dutch archeology.

Lynn Purnell is attending Texas A&M University this fall and is majoring in anthropology.

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Coming Events

Texas Archeological Society Annual Meeting - Lubbock, Texas - October 19-21, 1973.

University of Houston and Houston Archeological Society Seminar on Texas Archeology, September 27 thru November 15 at the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

Western History Assn. annual meeting - Fort Worth - October 10-13.

National Trust for Historic Preservation annual meeting - Cleveland, Ohio - October 11-14.

Texas Historical Commission annual meeting - Fort Worth - October 25-27.

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Here are Some Notes on European Archeology (and the role of the amateur archeologist) by HAS member L. W. Patterson.

It is interesting to note that serious amateur archeologists are as highly regarded in Europe, as in the United States. In the June 1973 issue of Antiquity, Dr. Peter Salway, Regional Director of the Open University in England, states that he is concerned that unnecessary jargon in the "new archeology" will provide a communication barrier between professionals, and tend to alienate the serious amateur. Amateur archeologists have a long history of good field work in England.

The need for alert amateurs in all locations can be related to data presented by the noted English archeologist, Grahame Clark. Out of twenty Mesolithic finds in Britain, only one was due to formal excavation, and the rest were from fortuitous accidents, such as gravel digging.

Amateur archeologists are reported to be currently active in Germany, assisting in excavation of Mesolithic sites.

The need for dedicated amateur archeologists seems to be world-wide. Not only are professional organizations perpetually short of manpower and money, but also the very nature of how sites are discovered points out the need for amateur participation on a continuing basis.

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A Touch of Humor

"Near as I can figure, it says 'Wear your hard hat'!"

Former HAS member, Bruce Duke, who currently is a wildlife biologist with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, has developed a technique for spotting obsidian on desert sites. The method is described in his article - A Technique for Locating Obsidian Artifacts.

While searching for archeological sites in Southern Arizona, it became apparent to the author that flaked obsidian material could be spotted more readily during certain times of the day than others. A more efficient system of recovering obsidian artifacts was developed and utilized after the physics of this phenomenon was understood.

The chipping and flaking of obsidian by primitive men removed the dull, outer covering or bark from the obsidian nodules. The glassy, inner core was thus revealed and subjected to flaking. Many of the flakes and finished points became scattered in and about their villages. Considerable erosion on (desert) sites in recent times has exposed a substantial amount of this material to the sunlight.

Much of the obsidian used by the prehistoric people in the desert areas was either translucent or transparent. These near-pure silicon varieties of obsidian remain almost invisible most of the time. A high percentage of the rays of the sun must hit directly to make them visible to the human eye. The majority of these rays must then be reflected into the eyes of the surveyor.

At high noon, a person can look straight down and easily spot any existing obsidian artifact, as the factors just mentioned are in effect. Unfortunately, only a very small area can be scanned at high noon. The most practical way to utilize this technique is to attain a combination of the maximum visual area and the best possible optical conditions.

Extensive surface hunting by the author has shown that this combination can best be achieved in the rarefied air of the Southern Arizona deserts, latitudes 31-32°N, approximately three hours after sunrise. This varies a few minutes depending on the season. Optimum conditions last several hours. An identical situation develops in reverse during the corresponding afternoon hours.

The surface hunter receives reflected light at an angle of roughly 45° during these optimum periods. This angle allows the reflected rays to strike in the vicinity of the eyes of an upright person. It is also a comfortable angle for a person walking with his head down, continuously searching.

It is necessary for the surface hunter to have the sun at his back at all times. The amount of reflected and refracted rays he receives from the surface must be controlled in order to separate the individual surface components. In addition, the hunter is unable to maintain any concentration if he has to look directly at the sun.

Pieces of obsidian literally stand out during the optimum recovery periods. The author has spotted obsidian objects as much as 15 yards away at times.

This technique will work well in any area having a dry climate and prolific sunlight. Its efficiency may be reduced somewhat on sites having dark surfaces. The author estimates that 75% of his obsidian artifacts have been found using this technique.

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Field Schools

The HAS was well represented at the Texas Archeological Society Field School at Waco this year. The following members registered for the school: Elaine Burleigh; James Calvert; Charles and Virginia Chandler; Lou, Marge, Jean and John Fullen; Richard Gregg; John Herbert and Dianne; Mr. & Mrs. Jack Klatt; Evelyn Lewis; Thomas Medlin; John Payne and Martin; David and Cathryn Salzar and Shirley Thompson.

Speaking of field schools, the amateur archeologist is being provided with an ever increasing number of opportunities to further his education in field archeology. In the Southwest this past year, in addition to the TAS school at Waco, field schools were conducted in New Mexico at Farmington and at Sierra Blanca, Texas (by Alan Skinner, SMU). In 1974 the University of Texas at San Antonio is considering a field school to be run by Dr. Thomas R. Hester, a frequent contributor to the HAS Newsletter and now Asst. Professor of Anthropology at UTSA.

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Site Surveys and Reports

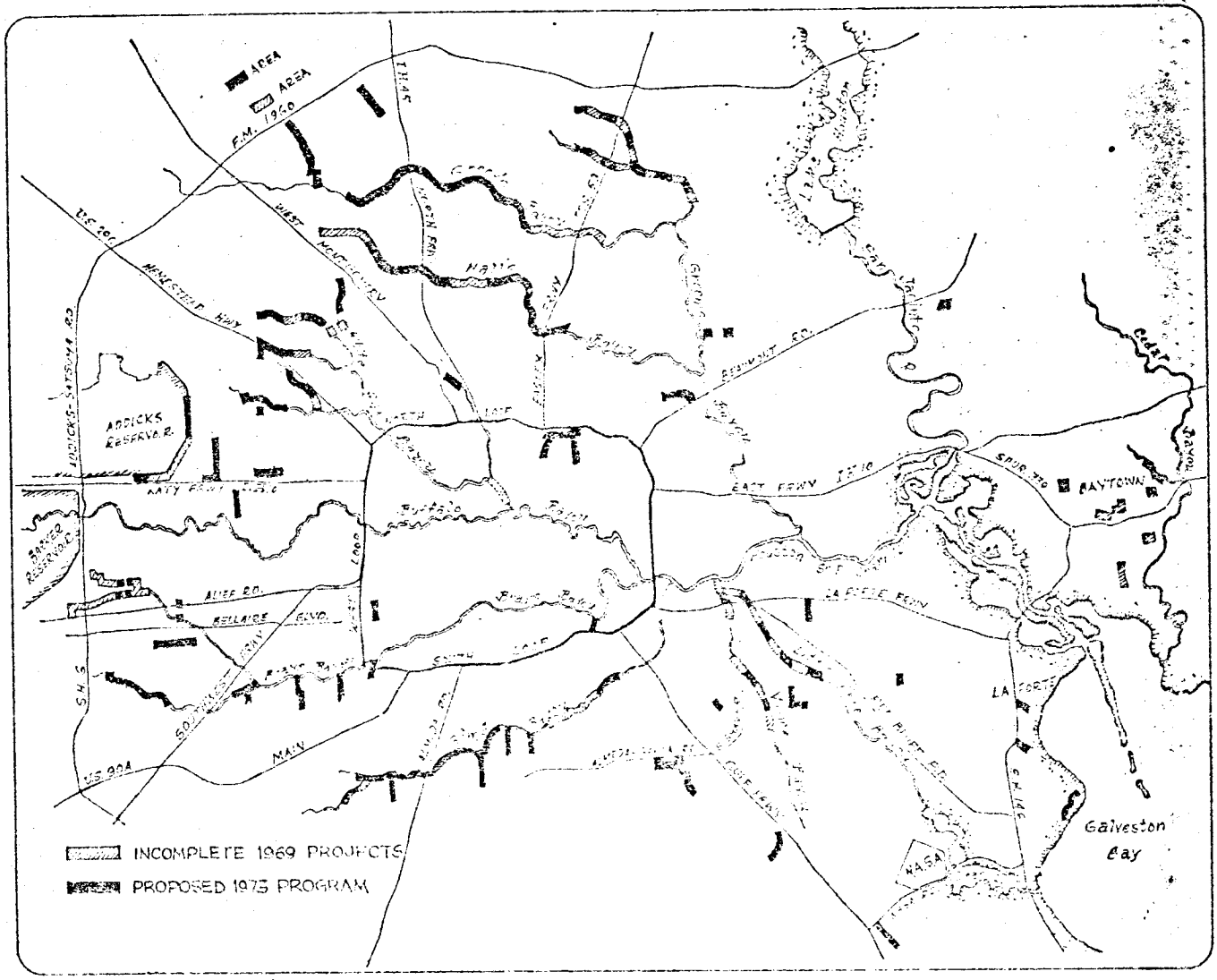
The October 1973 Newsletter of the Texas Archeological Society raises the question "Where are the Site Reports"? The Texas Archeological Research Lab is complaining that TAS members are not sending in reports on sites. This inactivity could stem from the fact that members are just not getting around to writing the reports on known sites or they are doing very little survey work in the field. The Houston area, while it has been surveyed for sites in the past, still has not been covered completely and there is much work to be done. Your editor, working with Texas Archeological Salvage Project personnel during the spring and summer, had the opportunity to survey areas not thoroughly covered in the past and many sites came to light. Many of these sites will be destroyed by the drainage and flood control projects already underway and proposed for the future. Recent flooding of residential areas around Houston due to abnormally heavy rains undoubtedly will pressure city and county officials into expediting flood control work.

Bayous around Houston are rapidly becoming concrete lined ditches and when this happens, the archeological sites are gone forever. The only fact on the plus side of the ledger is that flood control work does uncover sites occasionally when underbrush is cleared and bayou or stream banks are exposed. If you are fortunate (and get out enough) you may be there at the right time and be able to record a site for posterity and even learn enough about the site, before it is destroyed, to make a real contribution to archeology.

So - now is the time to get out in the field and search. The weather is getting cooler, the bugs fewer in number and perhaps the rains will taper off this fall. Send your site reports to: TARL, Balcones Research Center, Route 4, Box 189, Austin, Texas 78757.

The following map shows much of the flood control work under way and planned. There will be more projects started in the near future. Find those sites before it is too late!

county drainage system



Map shows incomplete '69 work, plans for '73 projects

The $30 million issue is an interim measure.

The areas in which the April 14 bond issue proposes flood control projects include:

- Clear Creek area: Six projects totaling $2.5 million.
- Sims Bayou: Seven projects totaling $2.6 million.
- Bray's Bayou: Ten projects totaling $3.4 million.
- Galveston Bay area near State Highway 146: Two projects costing $[illegible],000.
- Ship Channel and San Jacinto River areas: Two projects totaling $[illegible].
- Hunting Bayou and laterals and Kashmere Gardens area: One project costing $200,000.
- Vince Bayou: Three projects totaling $1.25 million.
- Cypress Creek: Work on various laterals at $1 million.
- Goose Creek: Various projects at $500,000.
- Greens Bayou: Extension of major channel rectification on Greens Bayou at $1.5 million and seven other projects costing $1.28 million.
- Cedar Bayou: Two projects totaling $749,000.
- Buffalo Bayou: Four projects totaling $3.66 million.

Last Minute Reminder

An eight week seminar on Texas Archeology is scheduled on Thursdays from September 27 thru November 15 (7:30 P.M. - 9:30 P.M.) at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. The program is sponsored jointly by the University of Houston and the Houston Archeological Society. Contact University of Houston - Downtown School, 925 Caroline, Houston, Texas 77002 if you are interested. Fee is $30. including handout material.

The archeology of East and Central Texas, the Coastal areas, Trans-Pecos area, the Plains and Pan-Handle will be covered by Dr. Dee Ann Story, Dr. Frank Hole, Dr. Jack Hughes, Dr. William Newcombe, David Dibble and other authorities on the various archeological regions in Texas.

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Early Man In America

Professor George F. Carter, Distinguished Professor, Department of Geology and Geography, Texas A&M University, continues to pursue his theory that early man left evidence of his existence in California at least 100,000 years ago. Professor Carter, who addressed the Houston Archeological Society on The Pre-Projectile Point Period in America in February 1968, advanced his theory over twenty years ago and met with much criticism.

This past summer Professor Carter carried out additional work on a site in San Diego Canyon and found carbon deposits, burned rocks and man made tools in river deposits laid down before the glacial period over 80,000 years ago.

Professor Carter has support for his theory from the late Dr. Leakey who visitied early man sites in California and examined stone artifacts similar to those found by Professor Carter.

Perhaps we can prevail upon Professor Carter to speak to the HAS again on his latest discoveries.

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