

SUU Government Relations & Regional Services

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Archeology Field School provides a mutually beneficial relationship for students, community

KANAB — Anthropology students enrolled in SUU's Archeology Field School are winding up a five-week course that has provided experiential learning and taught them valuable skills as they helped to preserve an ancient Ancestral Puebloan Virgin Anasazi site just outside Kanab.

The students have been learning archeology techniques, said Emily Dean, SUU assistant professor of anthropology and co-director of the field school, but that's not necessarily the primary point of the experience, she said.

"As they work on the site, the students are learning about the Virgin Anasazi people and the history of the region," she said. "They're learning things they might not remember if they read it in a book."

The real value of the field school is the experiential learning it has provided, Dean added.

"We're not just reading a summary of history; we're helping to uncover prehistory," she said.

Based in Kanab, the field school contributed to an archaeological survey of nearby public and private lands, including Zion National Park. Students learned to identify prehistoric artifacts, read topographic maps and conduct excavations of ancient prehistoric sites.

Barbara Frank, an archeologist who serves as co-director of the field school and curator of SUU's federal archeology repository, said the dig site is a late Pueblo II settlement built between A.D. 1050 and 1200.

This summer, students have continued to unearth an alignment of masonry that seems to have been built as a series of habitation and storage rooms, she said.

"Based on what we've found, we believe the structure was either burned and the roof timbers fell in, or it was an open ramada constructed for shade," Frank said. "We're still trying to figure it out."

The site was originally recorded by archeologist Doug McFadden the Bureau of Land Management in the early 1980s. The property owner, Milo McCowan of Kanab, later purchased the land to develop it, but he wanted to preserve its archeological sites and initially hired a contract archeologist for that purpose.

Eventually, McCowan approached SUU to preserve the site, and the field school was born.

Over a period of years, SUU faculty and students will investigate the site while teaching students the principles of archeology, Frank said.

"It's a mutually beneficial arrangement," she said.

It's been beneficial to the students, Dean said, because they're learning techniques they can use if they're interested in finding employment as archeology technicians. Last year's class produced four techs who went to work for local government agencies, she said.

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The field school also teaches the students to work together, Dean said.

“The students are together five days a week for 24 hours a day,” she said. “It’s a process of cooperative, collaborative learning.”

The school is also “an unusual example of public-private collaboration that is almost unique in archeology, and that’s something we’d like to encourage,” Dean said.

She said she is grateful to McCowan, the property owner, who has allowed the field school access to the dig site and has been helpful and cooperative.

The community has been generous as well, she said.

“Local residents, businesses and government agencies provided both donations and logistical help,” Dean said. “John Jorgensen arranged our lodging in Kanab and is letting us use his office as a laboratory space, Bill Welsh lent us shade tents and tables, and Don Sprecher helped us move our equipment to the site. Local businesses donated the sanitary facilities, and the Kanab Chamber of Commerce and CEBA have been very supportive of the project.”

Transportation to and from the field school has been provided by a grant from SUU’s Office of Government Relations & Regional Services through the Outdoor Initiative.

“I think that’s particularly appropriate because you can’t get any more outdoor in education than this,” Dean said.

Frank said that, as part of the field school, SUU faculty and students make an annual presentation to the community to “tell people what we’re doing here, and we’ll invite the townspeople to come out at the end of the month and see the progress we’ve made.”

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Cutline for jpg titled “dig”

Ian Wright (foreground) of Salt Lake City and a student in the SUU Archeology Field School, works with Claire Crow (left) and Dan Rhode of Zion National Park to uncover and preserve the Pueblo II site outside Kanab.

Cutline for jpg titled “instruct”

Emily Dean, assistant professor of anthropology and co-director of the SUU Archeology Field School (right), instructs student Sonny Mazzettia, a senior interdisciplinary studies major from Orderville. Mazzettia and other students benefited from the experiential learning provided by the five-week course that concludes next week.

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Emily Dean, SUU assistant professor of anthropology (left), and Barbara Frank, curator of SUU’s federal archeology repository (left center), discuss the Archeology Field School with Jim McDonald, dean of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences (right center), and Ed Meyer of KE Kanab, which represents the interests of SUU Government Relations & Regional Services in Kane County (right).