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Frison Institute of Archaeology & Anthropology
University of Wyoming
1000 E. University, Box 3431
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THE FRISON INSTITUTE

Supporting Archaeological Research at U.W.

Fall 2024

From the Director, Todd Surovell

Imagine a resource that guarantees the future of archaeological research in Wyoming, regardless of the ebb and flow of university and scientific funding. Thanks to your generosity, that resource is now a reality. The first donation to the Frison Institute endowment was received in July 1998. This year I am happy to report that the combined value of all donations to our endowments has exceeded **\$1 MILLION!** This endowment in every way has been a community effort. The median donation received was only \$200, and in all we have received well over 1,300 contributions from more than 400 donors. As an archaeologist, I don't know a lot about fundraising. I do know that when large endowments are usually created, they are the work of one or two wealthy philanthropists. For obvious reasons, most anthropologists and archaeologists do not fit that description. Instead, we have joined forces to set in stone Doc Frison's legacy of archaeological research at the University of Wyoming. For those unfamiliar with endowments, rather than spending the money directly, we invest it and use the proceeds generated by those investments. What \$1 million in the bank means for the Frison Institute is that we can devote more than \$40,000 per year to support research by students, faculty, and other professional archaeologists. Those funds will be available in perpetuity. They will be here no matter which way political winds blow. We can keep doing archaeology when the state budget is flush and when it is strained. I want to thank all of our donors over the last 26 years for your generosity. I want to thank all of the members of our Board of Friends, current and past. It is incredibly heartening to know that there is a large community of individuals who know that the scientific study of the physical remnants of the human past is a worthwhile endeavor, one that not only informs us about our shared history but also the myriad ways of being human. It also provides important context for issues affecting the modern world. This endowment will be a long-lasting monument to our combined efforts. Thank you!



UW RESEARCHERS DISCOVER THE OLDEST MONUMENT IN THE AMERICAS

Dr. Jason Toohey, Associate Professor

The Callacpuma Prehistory Program investigates the origins and development of inequality in the Cajamarca Valley of northern Peru. Our team has surveyed and excavated several sectors of Callacpuma, a 615-acre site occupied intermittently from before 3,000 BCE until after the Spanish invasion in 1532 CE. Initial fieldwork, made possible by seed funding from the Frison Institute, allowed us to secure larger grants, and the project is now funded by the National Science Foundation. One of the project's most significant findings, published this year in *Science Advances*, is the discovery of one of the earliest known monumental, megalithic ceremonial plazas in the Americas. Radiocarbon dating from the plaza's foundation places its initial construction around 2,750 BCE – roughly the same age as initial constructions at Stonehenge, and 100 years before the Great Pyramids. This plaza, measuring 18 meters in diameter, features at least two entryways and a surrounding 1-meter-wide corridor. Built during the Andean Late Archaic Period, a time when relatively mobile foragers were just beginning to experiment with agriculture, the plaza raises intriguing questions. Our current research focuses on understanding why a group of relatively mobile foragers would invest so much effort in designing and constructing such a large public space. This exciting research would not have been possible without the generous and continued support of the Frison Institute.



The 4,700 year old monumental plaza from the Callacpuma site, Cajamarca Valley, Peru

INSTITUTE FUNDED RESEARCH

STUDENT RESEARCH

Student research continues to be a major focus of Frison Institute funding. This year, the institute funded a total of nine student research projects, including two undergraduate projects. This year’s crop of funded grants was largely lab-based with zooarchaeology, paleoethnobotany, and geochronology (dating) projects represented. The Frison Institute has become the most important source of research funding for students in the Anthropology Department.

WILLIAM AND GLORIA TYRRELL FUND

PhD student McKenna Litynski received funding to use zooarchaeology by mass spectroscopy (ZooMS) to determine the animal species used to produce bone awls and needles from across Wyoming. This technique involves extracting collagen protein from bones and analyzing its structure. By identifying protein fragments called peptides in a mass spectrometer, researchers can link the collagen back to specific animal species or genera. McKenna participated in our initial study to identify the species used to manufacture needles at the La Prele Mammoth site, an Early Paleoindian site in Converse County. We were surprised to discover that those needles were made from the bones of red foxes, bobcats or lynx, and jackrabbits. This finding suggests that the first peoples in Wyoming may have trapped these animals not only for their bones to make tools, but also for their fur to create warm clothing. McKenna is now expanding this research to examine a wider range of bone implements across the entirety of Wyoming prehistory.

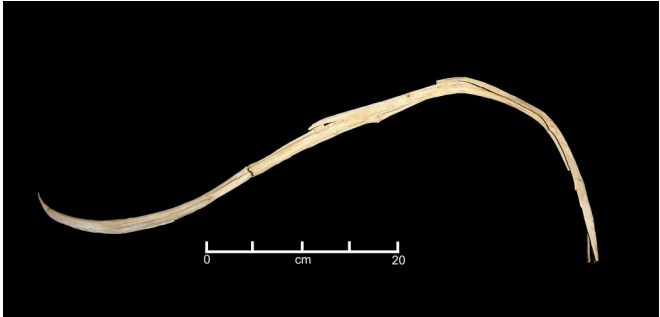


Eyed needles from the La Prele site were made from the bones of red foxes (needle shown), bobcat or lynx, and hares.

PATRICK ORION MULLEN FUND

by Amu Phillips, MA Student, St. Cloud State University

As ice patches retreat due to climate change, the materials within them, including rare organic archaeological materials, are exposed. In 2015, two Late Prehistoric bows were recovered from the Cougar Ice Patch group in the Absaroka Mountains of northwest Wyoming. Both bows date to the Late Prehistoric period. Their short lengths, poor materials (spruce and pine), and breakage suggest both were used by children. I am using strontium isotope analysis to examine human mobility. Strontium isotope variability reflects regional differences in bedrock and can be used as a “tracer” of organic materials. Initial results indicate the bows are not local to the area where they were found.



A 625 year old bow made of spruce from the Cougar Ice Patch group in the Absaroka Range.

JUNE FRISON FUND

As part of her thesis research, M.A. student Mackenzie DePlata Peterson received funding to date mammoth remains from the Warren Mammoth site in Laramie County. She found that the mammoth died close to the start of the Clovis period at approximately 13,150 BP.



Mackenzie DePlata Peterson prepares a mammoth rib for transport at the Warren Mammoth site.

FUND FOR WYOMING ARCHAEOLOGY

by Dr. Bree Doering, University of Wyoming

Last summer, Dr. Maddie Mackie and I returned to the Colby Site for test excavations and remote sensing. This was the first time archaeology has been conducted at Colby since Dr. George Frison finished his work in 1978. The team, including Dr. Kelli Moran, a geologist from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, set out to determine whether any of the Late Pleistocene arroyo was preserved. This level might have more mammoth remains, or other clues about the people who hunted mammoths at the site. We used ground penetrating radar to identify old channel structures, which we confirmed with a series of auger tests. Through this pilot work, we did identify several promising areas for future work.



Students from the Weber State University Field School on their way to work at the Colby Mammoth site.

FALL LECTURE

Dr. Jesse Casana of Dartmouth College spoke about using declassified Corona satellite imagery for archaeological research in the Middle East and around the world.



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