

Archaeological Field School: Tanana Basin Archaeology
ANTH-495/695 (6 credits)

----- Syllabus -----

meeting: Monday-Saturday, 9AM-6PM daily, field
May 18 through June 20, 2009

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Meeting: Five week course, May 18 through June 20, 2009. Preliminary meeting at EIEL Bldg Room 303 on May 19, 9:00 AM.

Format: fieldwork, lab work and lecture

Course Description:

Mead site is a multicomponent site consisting of at least 4 components dating from 14,000 to 1,400 years ago in deeply buried stratified contexts in the mid Tanana Basin, near Delta Junction, Alaska. This site has received little investigation given its importance in the early prehistory of northwest North America, but initial excavations have yielded lithic tools, organic tools, and faunal remains from multiple components. Along with Broken Mammoth and Swan Point, this is one of the oldest sites in northwest North America, and indeed in the Western Hemisphere. The presence of faunal remains and lithic artifacts within stratified contexts provides an opportunity to document patterning in site use and test hypotheses about technology, subsistence, and settlement of ancient populations in Interior Alaska.

The 2009 excavation and field school at Mead is designed to better characterize site function and delineate site formation and site disturbance processes. We expect to recover numerous lithic and faunal remains, possibly in association with hearth features. This will give the students of the field school an unparalleled opportunity to participate in a cutting edge excavation of an important site, using modern archaeological equipment and techniques that will be valuable to them in their future work and classes.

We will use the grid established in previous years, and a Leica Total Station will be used for mapping. Students will be trained in both computer and traditional methods of provenience control. Various excavation strategies, stratigraphic profile drawing, and field recording will be emphasized. Archaeological features and articulated faunal remains may be encountered, thus enabling students to get specialized training in excavating and preserving these rare entities.

Stratigraphy at the site consists of a series of aeolian sediments up to four m thick with several buried paleosol complexes. Given the complexity and time depth of the site, students will get a chance to develop excavation skills useful for many different archaeological problems (i.e., zooarchaeology, stratigraphy, spatial analysis, etc.). This is one of few sites in Interior Alaska with excellent faunal preservation, micro-stratigraphic

and radiocarbon controls. We will also conduct optically stimulated luminescence dating (OSL), and students will be able to take part in this cutting edge research.

Lectures will be conducted on a regular basis on various aspects of archaeological theory, excavation practice, and analyses. I feel that archaeological field schools should give students both hands-on practical training in excavation and laboratory techniques as well as understanding the interface between theory and practice.

As part of this field course, students will gain experience in field survey and testing through investigation of the nearby Quartz Lake Klein site and Keystone Dune sites (a few days are planned for these excursions). This will provide useful practical knowledge about survey strategies and implementation of the kind of work that is most common in cultural resource management positions. We have also scheduled flintknapping and atlatl demonstrations by experts.

At the end of this field course, the students should:

1. understand archaeological research designs and their impacts on field investigations
2. have competence in field excavation and documentation methods (including basic mapping, use of total station, line-level, stratigraphic profiling, and excavation techniques).
3. understand basic problems in subarctic stratigraphy, taphonomy, and site formation and site disturbance factors
4. gain experience in working in remote field settings
5. evaluate the context of archaeological finds

Required Texts:

There are no required texts. Articles relating to geoarchaeology, paleoecology, regional culture history, lithic and faunal analyses, megafaunal extinctions, and peopling of the New World will be provided.

Students With Disabilities:

The University of Alaska Fairbanks is committed to equal opportunity for students experiencing disabilities. Due to the physical nature of archaeological field studies, students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor prior to enrollment in the course so that arrangements may be made to ensure a positive educational experience.

Grading Policy:

This course uses a letter grading system (A, B, C, D, and F). For undergraduates, there are three criteria used in grading for this course. A=90-100%, B=80-90%, C=70-80%, D=60-70%, F=0-60%.

• student field book (50%)

This will be graded in terms of clarity, completeness, accuracy of recording, and attention to detail. Each time we excavate an archaeological site, archaeologists destroy the record; therefore, recording accurate and precise information is essential to the process.

• participation in field and discussion activities/attitude (30%)

Participation in all aspects of this excavation is important, and participation in discussions relating to lectures and excavation is strongly encouraged. A positive attitude

is important for a productive excavation in field conditions. Assigned readings must be read prior to our discussions.

• excavation skill and attention to detail (20%)

Students will be evaluated in terms of their attention to detail in the excavation and treatment of artifacts and faunal remains.

Graduate students: For those taking the field school for graduate credits (ANTH-695), an additional term project is required. This will be determined by the instructor in the field to capitalize on new discoveries, and may be a report on preliminary faunal analysis or sediment analyses. The term project will involve appropriate analysis at the Master's level. For graduate students, the term project counts as 40% of the final grade, field book as 40%, and participation as 20%.

Location

The site is located about 20 miles northwest of Delta Junction, Alaska, and about 80 miles southeast of Fairbanks, though it can be reached by road from the Alaska Highway. UAF will provide camp, cooking and excavation gear and equipment, and food. Students will need to provide their own tent, sleeping bag, and personal gear, though we will work with you if you need a tent. The weather is usually nice in the early summer (50s-80s °F), but rain gear is necessary.

What To Bring:

Basic excavation tools and field gear will be provided by UAF (trowels, screens, wall tent, etc.). You will need to bring personal camping gear (sleeping bags, tent, rain gear, coat, gloves, etc.). A more detailed list of what to bring will be provided by the instructor.

Schedule

- Mon, May 18: meet at 9:00 AM at Eielson 303, preliminary briefing on the course, the site, the excavation process, and the schedule. Visit to the UA Museum and the Campus site.
- Week 1: Gearing up for the trip; departing Fairbanks for the Mead site. Visit to the Broken Mammoth Site, setting up camp at Mead Site.
- Week 2: Excavation and lecture (site gridding, mapping, excavation)
- Week 3: Excavation and lecture (stratigraphy, geoarchaeology, site formation, paleoecology)
- Week 4: Excavation and lecture (culture history, Holocene adaptive strategies, lithic analysis)
- Week 5: Excavation and lecture (faunal analysis, megafaunal extinctions)
- Week 6: excavation, lecture (peopling of the New World), backfilling, breaking camp
- Sat, Jun 20, depart Mead for Fairbanks