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## From Maya Pyramids to Paleoindian Projectile Points: the Importance of Public Outreach in Archaeology

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“Even at its best, the interest our public takes in the history and archaeology of its own country is discouragingly small. It is our great dream that some day the public as a whole will awaken to the great fund of romance and history that now lies hidden in the ruins, not only in one area, but in all parts of the country. The slogan ‘See America First’ should be changed to ‘Know America First’ in all that the change of the verb implies.” (Carl Guthe 1921)

Public outreach in archaeology, particularly in the USA, is often perceived as an addendum to any archaeological project, a useful addition if time/money/staff allow. Numerous books and publications contend with the major issues of ethics and theory (McManamon 1991; Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015; Shackel and Chambers 2004; Wylie 2003), but fall short of addressing the practical application of outreach. To a certain extent, this situation is understandable, as all sites vary and the methods and practicalities of communicating with the public may be constrained. Despite this, the effective communication of research is not only an integral part of archaeology, but also an essential one that is vital to the role that archaeology plays in society. Four out of the eight ‘Principles of Archaeological Ethics’ (#1, 2, 4, 6) set out by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA)

(<http://www.saa.org/AbouttheSociety/PrinciplesofArchaeologicalEthics/tabid/203/Default.aspx>) stipulate active engagement with the public and it is mandated by law in the National Historic Resources act of 1966 (Section 101) and the Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979 (Section 10(c)). Most, if not all, archaeologists do perform outreach whether consciously or subconsciously. However, the fact that many still relegate this service to a secondary role means that, when the public does not understand what we do or why it is valuable, we have only ourselves to blame.

Archaeologist Charles McGimsey (1972: 5) stated “...there is no such thing as private archaeology.” If we, as archaeologists, do not tell people what we have discovered and what it means to them then we have wasted our lives. Archaeology is not about

individual artifacts or filling in museum cases, it is about finding usable information about human behavior, expanding our knowledge of the past and can even give a voice to the historically underrepresented or the voiceless. As such, archaeological outreach should be an integral component in all major archaeological projects, from research and training, to Cultural Resource Management (CRM)/rescue archaeology. Indeed, applications for funding from bodies such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) require a consideration of the broader impacts of research, providing the opportunity to engage in outreach from the beginning of a project.

Ideally, outreach should encompass short- and long-term objectives. As a community, archaeologists have become generally good at recognizing the need for, and conducting, short-term public outreach. This type is often in the form of tours, talks, and posters. CRM projects with legally mandated outreach can include elaborate websites and even temporary exhibitions. However, after the dust of the backfilling settles, these activities cease, with little thought paid to continuing public engagement. We call these activities by many names: civic engagement, participatory research, and public archaeology. Often these activities have more to do with our work and our projects than addressing any needs of the communities. If more people understood the value of archaeological research, more could be done to protect cultural resources and to make funding easier. We want local communities to understand what we are doing to reduce potential problems and gather information we would not otherwise obtain. We want to meet our legal and ethical obligations to educate the public. A comprehensive archaeological outreach program should address these concerns but also address the community's long-term interests. A separate discussion, one beyond the scope of this article but worth mentioning, is that of school curricula. Archaeological outreach and public engagement are different from formal education and should be approached in a different manner.

These long-term objectives do not necessarily require extensive development and can arise out of short-term efforts. Projects that feature a significant teaching and learning aspect (see Reetz and Quackenbush 2016; Sgouros and Stirn 2016) can continue

beyond the initial archaeological project by expanding into a wider network of sites and locations. There are also community focused archaeological projects (e.g., Merriman 2004) that are kept alive because of the public's interest. Other projects may be more difficult to sustain long after the original excavations have ceased. The key, we argue, is in the engagement of the community in recognizing the value of archaeology and making the members active participants in its future.

There is another side to outreach that is often absent from any discussion. What can we, as archaeologists, learn from the public regarding local history and knowledge? How many significant discoveries have been made by the public? How many times have archaeologists sought the knowledge of the wider community in an attempt to broaden our understanding? By engaging the public, we can enrich our own research. This perspective is nothing new and many archaeologists already incorporate local knowledge as part of their research (Ford, personal communication 2016).

Ultimately, the public is interested in archaeology. This attraction is attested to through movies, television shows, websites, and other media. These representations continually serve as advertisements for archaeology and fuel the public's interest. We, as archaeologists, can utilize and further this excitement if we engage with outreach from the start of our research. The difficulty we would argue, is that the public view is often an idealized form of archaeology, closer to fantasy than fact. This misperception can lead to disillusionment, for example, when the hidden underground maze is replaced with dirt and stratigraphy. Thus, any outreach project needs to balance this interest with an engagement in the reality of archaeology.

The aim of this article is twofold: to present a framework of archaeology that integrates science, education, and practical applications of our work in the short- and long-term; and to highlight the benefits of this framework. These goals will be achieved by presenting two case studies based on personal experiences. The first is the BRASS/EI Pilar Project (Wernecke where outreach has made a lasting contribution to both the archaeological investigations and the local communities, and the second is the Gault

School of Archaeological Research [GSAR] (Wernecke and Williams where ongoing efforts in public outreach hope to achieve an effective, widespread, and lasting contribution to scientific research and the local community (Figure 1). (More information about the two projects can be found on the web: [www.marc.ucsb.edu](http://www.marc.ucsb.edu) and [www.gaultschool.org](http://www.gaultschool.org).)

## THE GAULT SITE AND EL PILAR NATIONAL RESERVE

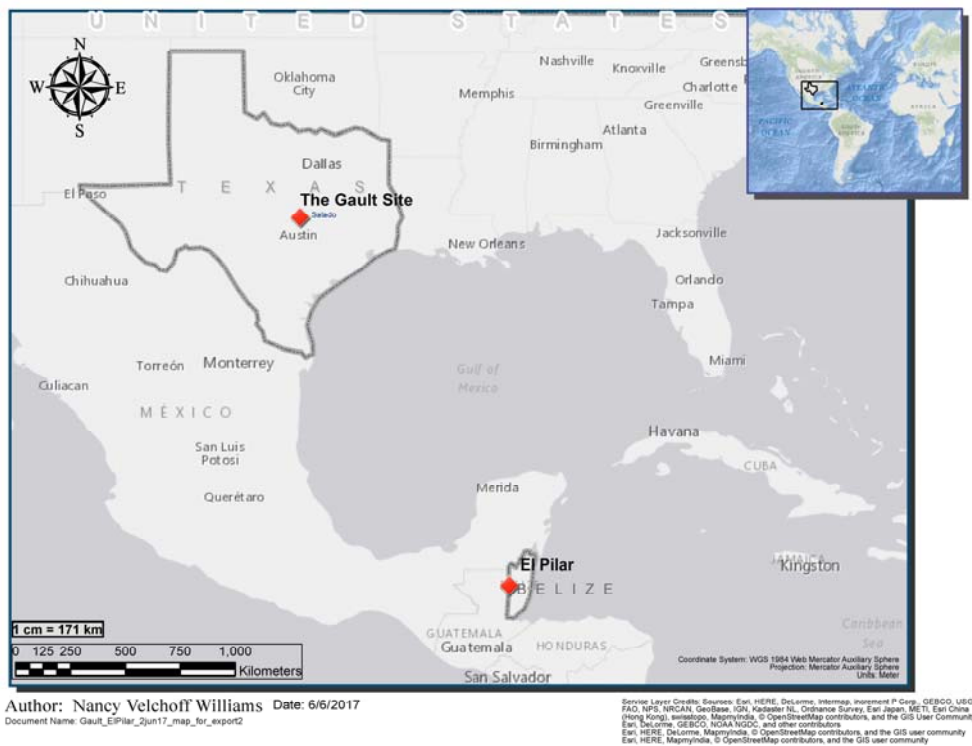


Figure 1. Location of the Classic Maya site of El Pilar, Belize and the Paleo-Indian site of Gault Site, Texas, USA. Produced by Nancy Velchoff (GSAR).

Lessons from these two examples, while not perfect, can be applied to other situations, as they illustrate what is possible beyond archaeological field research. No outreach project can be perfect but we argue that these two projects have worked well and continue to do so. They highlight two different sites and locations that required different approaches and, in our opinion, worked effectively. We agree that the wider and continued discussion on the nature of outreach, ethics, and effective communication is necessary. However, we argue that these discussions should not preclude active public

engagement. We should not allow the fear of thoughts, such as “you’re doing it wrong,” to dissuade us from attempting outreach in any form. Ultimately, our debates surrounding public archaeology should not be to the detriment of its application or the active education of archaeologists in implementing public outreach.

## **REASONS BEHIND OUTREACH**

Before discussing our own efforts, we outline the reasons behind outreach. As stated in the introduction, if the public does not understand what we do or why it is valuable, then we have only ourselves to blame. Unfortunately, archaeologists often approach the issue of why archaeology is valuable with quotes about forgetting the past and repeating it. Too often, comments like these ones are issued by archaeologists as a warning to a perceived lack of public interest. However, archaeology can have a tangible effect in the world. From education (King 2016) to community heritage tourism projects (Levine et al. 2005), archaeological research can and does have a key role in our communities and in our societies.

The history of public archaeology in the United States began with the goal of reducing vandalism and looting of sites by educating the public (Ellick 2016). This effort entailed the creation of programs by science educators for schoolchildren and classrooms as well as field programs, such as Passport in Time (U.S. Forest Service) or Project Archaeology (Bureau of Land Management) to inform and educate. The aim of these projects was, and still is, to involve the public in preserving heritage. These projects fulfill the ideals of educating the public and involving them in the preservation of our past.

Until recently, the elephant in the room with public outreach was the financial aspect of archaeology. This matter was discussed in a special issue of *Public Archaeology* (2014:1-3 [see Gould and Burtenshaw 2014 for an introduction]) which represented an important step toward resolving it. To place this concern in a wider context, in 2014 alone, tourism contributed \$7.58 trillion to the global economy. In the USA, tourism contributed \$1.4 trillion to the GDP. A 2005 white paper on cultural and heritage tourism

reported 81% of US adults who took a trip of 50 miles or more were cultural and heritage tourists who, on average, spent more money than other travelers (U.S. Department of Commerce and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities:2005). On a large scale, heritage tourism has the potential to stimulate economic growth in a country (Min and Roh 2013). While understudied, the same is true for tourism on a smaller geographic scale, including cities, towns, and rural communities (Coben 2014). Put simply, archaeology plays a valuable, albeit small but significant role within the economy.

This economic impact has two positive outcomes. The first is that archaeology can contribute to the wealth of a community. Second, the community can help fund and support archaeological projects. These impacts are not mutually exclusive, and can have a direct influence on the public and the archaeologists. As a community, we constantly have to find revenues for funding, and often rely on sources of public funding, such as the NSF. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the public understand what exactly we do with those funds and how it contributes to them. As with any subject that receives public funding, there will always be detractors, but it is our responsibility to communicate the importance of our research. In 2013, two Congressmen attacked the use of NSF funds for research in anthropological/archaeological fields (Cantor and Smith 2013). In 2015, they doubled down on that attack stating that the research is of questionable value while concluding it is, in fact, simply wasteful spending (Paul and Smith 2015). The congressmen went on to state that with a limited federal budget, these funds are keeping us from finding cures for diseases and helping wounded soldiers. The truth behind these public attacks reveal a basic misunderstanding of the value of archaeological research and highlights the negative perception by politicians of research in the anthropological/archaeological fields.

Attacks on perceived "worthless" projects are often made arbitrarily and selected for no other reason than the title of the project (Timmer 2017). While deconstructing these comments is not the focus of this article, it should be noted that archaeological funding accounts for somewhere between .12 and .29 percent of the total NSF budget, depending on what is included as archaeological in nature (Joyce 2016). We have to

ask ourselves, is it that our political representatives are failing us? Alternatively, are we failing ourselves by inadequately communicating our research to them and to the public at large? Perhaps it is time to offset our research objectives with the consideration that we can make a genuine contribution to the societies in which we work.

A larger issue here is the negative perception of archaeology, as is evident in Cantor and Smith (2013), that it is not “useful” in the same manner as medicine or law. This view grossly undervalues the educational, societal, communal, and economic effects of archaeology. At a basic level, learning about archaeology, as with any liberal arts subject, teaches students critical thinking. A skill that is becoming increasingly crucial in the modern world as ever faster means of communication have put information, regardless of its authenticity, at the touch of a button. Would Cantor and Smith have reached the same opinion upon critically evaluating their claims?

Ultimately, the economic impact of archaeology is driven by the educational and social value of archaeology. Archaeology provides a physical link with our past, which we as archaeologists interpret. In essence, we piece together a jigsaw puzzle and become storytellers, but these stories are as relevant today as they have been in the past. Sometimes this link is tangible, like the application of ancient farming techniques in modern communities (see the BRASS/El Pilar Project below). Other times, our knowledge is less tangible but can be more meaningful to our understanding of what it means to be human.

## **THE BRASS/EL PILAR PROJECT AND THE EL PILAR SITE**

The first example of a public outreach program in archaeology is the Belize River Archaeological Settlement Survey (BRASS) that was initiated in 1983 by Dr. Anabel Ford of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Focused on the upper Belize River area north of the modern town of San Ignacio, Belize (Figure 2), one of the major research objectives of this project was to investigate the site of El Pilar, a newly rediscovered Maya center on the edge of the Petén plateau, 47 km from Tikal Guatemala.



## EL PILAR ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESERVE, BELIZE

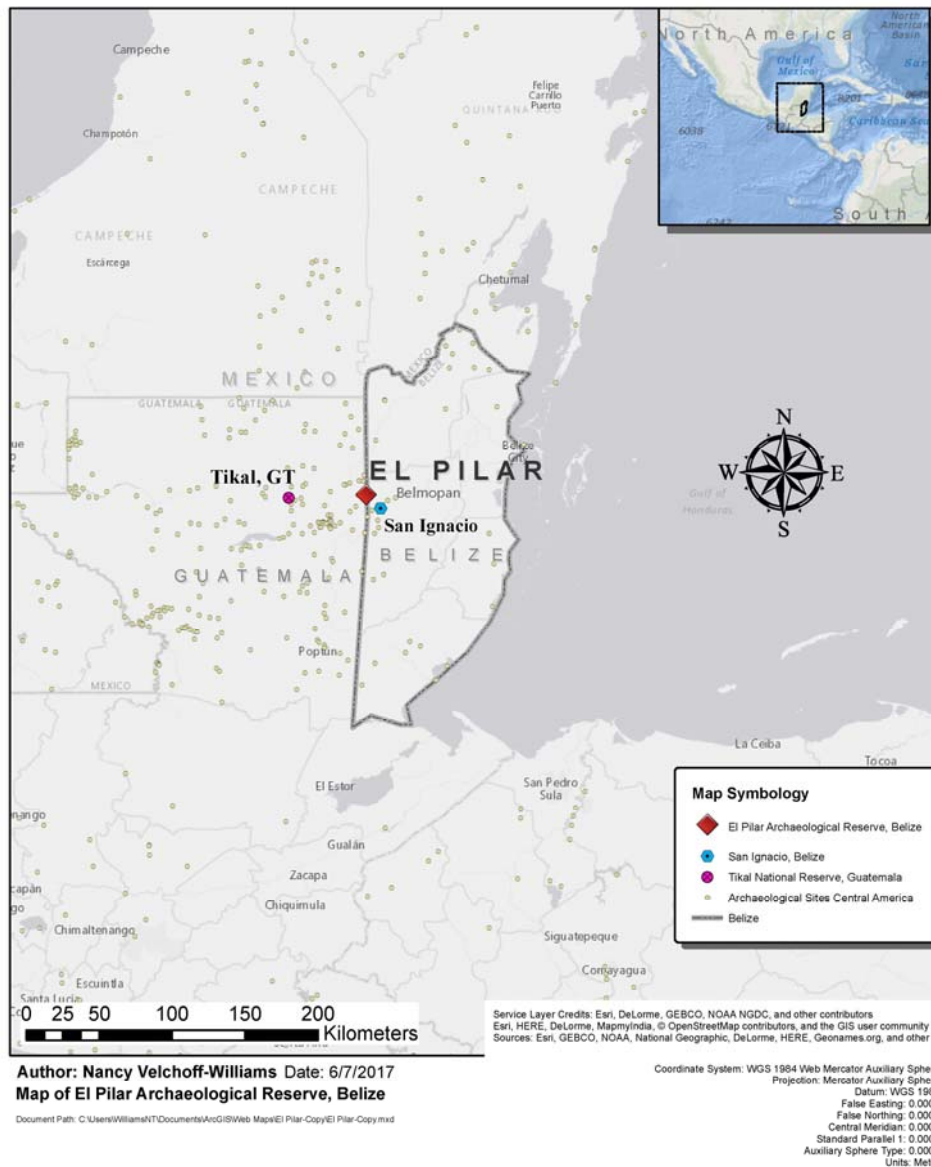


Figure 2. Location of the Classic Maya site of El Pilar, Belize with the major site of Tikal, Guatemala noted and the modern town of San Ignacio, Belize. Produced by Nancy Velchoff (GSAR).

The site consists of numerous plazas and major structures and covers a considerable area of the Belizean/Guatemalan rainforest (Figure 3). Due to the size and scope of the BRASS/El Pilar project ([www.marc.ucsb.edu](http://www.marc.ucsb.edu)), numerous parties were stakeholders in the archaeological work. El Pilar lies along the disputed border of Belize and

Guatemala, and both governments were interested in how they could expand ecotourism in the area. In addition, environmental groups were drawn to preserving plant and animal habitats while local farmers squatting on government lands in the vicinity were worried about their futures. The project also employed many local residents who wanted to know what their short- and long-term gains could be. This aspect was complicated further by rumors that were spread about the archaeologists: apparently, they were supposedly digging up gold and artifacts and stealing them.



*Figure 3. BRASS/El Pilar Archaeologists Miguel Orrego and Melissa Grzybowski excavate a tunnel beneath EP7 (Xikna) and Plaza Copal. Examination of the stratigraphy revealed eight construction episodes that revealed a lengthy Preclassic history. ©D. Clark Wernecke*

Due to this sustained, multi-component level of interest, outreach became essential to communicating the economic, social, and educational value of archaeology. Initially, a “Fiesta El Pilar” was organized so that the local communities and all interested parties had a chance to visit the site (Figure 4). This fair, held at the site, featured local musicians, food, and beverages, while allowing people to see what the archaeologists

were doing and to ask them questions. In turn, this event led to the establishment of a local Community Based Organization (CBO) in Guatemala and Belize called Amigos de El Pilar ([interconnection.org/elpilar/amigos.htm](http://interconnection.org/elpilar/amigos.htm)[AdEP]). For political reasons, there needed to be a separate organization in each nation, but the organizations shared a board of directors. Tours of the site led by the field crews promoted an archaeological understanding of the site and highlighted the value of the area to the community. Eventually a program was set up to train local licensed tour guides to handle tours after the archaeologists had left.



*Figure 4. Maya dancers from the nearby village of Bullet Tree Falls at the Fiesta El Pilar, Belize. ©D. Clark Wernecke*

Due to the interest of the local governments and their desire to expand tourism, international conferences were organized to map out a long-term management plan, which was published and disseminated (Awe 2001; Ford 1998a, 1998b; MARC 2016). These meetings led to the formation of protected areas in Belize and Guatemala. They included agreements that promoted the local community organization (AdEP) to the administration of the protected areas alongside the governments. This step gave the

local residents an ownership stake in El Pilar and ensured protection of the cultural heritage. A scientific advisory committee was designated to help decide what future scientific work would occur within the protected areas.

Throughout this process, the project leaders were dealing with stakeholders in Belize and Guatemala. Differences in resource availability and surrounding populations resulted in different trajectories on both sides of the border. In Belize, a community building was constructed with the help of an non-profit from the USA. The structure exhibited a model of El Pilar as it had appeared at its height and provided community members with opportunities to sell food, handicrafts, and tour services to visitors (Figure 5). A sustainable agriculture program, designed to engage the local farmers, grew into a network of farmers using traditional techniques of the milpa forest-garden cycle (Ford and Nigh 2015). This project reached into the classroom by including a prototypical forest garden at a village school (Ford 2012; Ford and Ellis 2013). In Guatemala, the road to the site was improved, a caretaker appointed, and signage installed.



*Figure 5. The model of Classic Period El Pilar in the Be Pukte (“Road to Bullet Tree”) Cultural Center. Major structures and the surrounding landscape are featured. ©Melissa Grzybowski*

While these initiatives went beyond traditional archaeology, they founded an important collaboration that has enhanced the research objectives. The project integrated archaeology with larger scientific concerns, community development, education, and local economic interests to leave a legacy that builds contributions to archaeological science. Significant archaeological field research was conducted and looting and vandalism ended (Coffey et al. 2014; Ford et al. 2009; Whittaker et al. 2009). Natural scientists gathered evidence from the park and information from local residents to understand the complex nature of an anthropogenic environment (Campbell et al. 2006; Ford 2008; Ford and Nigh 2009; Ross 2011). Students from around the world were involved in all aspects of the project. Site tours led by these students made them more confident in presenting their work to the public; they learned effective methods of making their work understandable and questions/comments from their tour groups led them to consider different ideas and points of view.

The legacy of the BRASS/El Pilar project continues to make a real difference in local people's lives, who manage and maintain the park, guide tours, and sell local food and crafts. Much of this was accomplished with little extra time and effort from the archaeological staff and a lot of help from local organizations interested in a coordinated effort to link local field research with community life in Belize and Guatemala (Figure 6).



*Figure 6. D. Clark Wernecke leads a tour of El Pilar. ©Melissa Grzybowski*

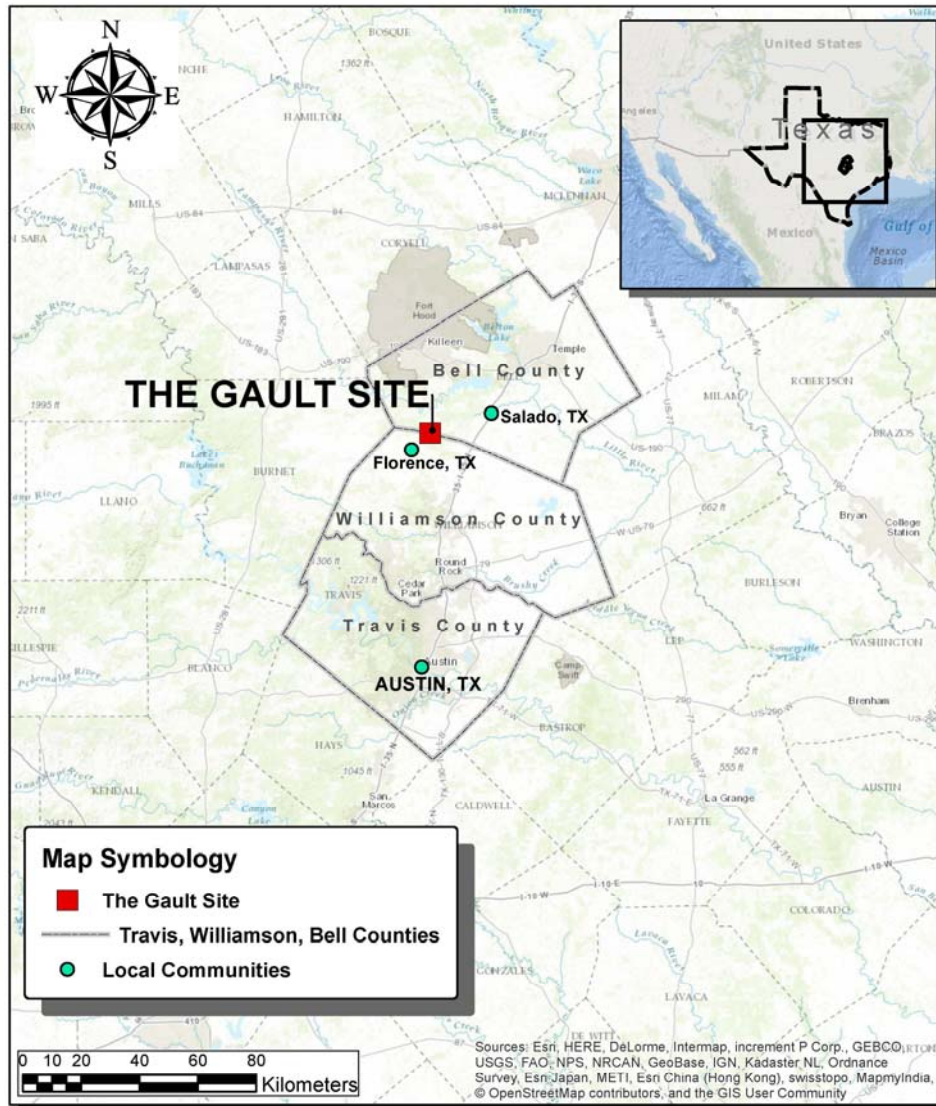
## GSAR AND THE GAULT SITE

Our second example where public outreach in archaeology has been successfully conducted is from a project in a significantly different setting and, at first glance, with less to offer to nearby residents (Figure 7). The Gault School of Archaeological Research (GSAR) is a non-profit dedicated to research and education regarding the earliest peoples in the Americas ([gaultschool.org](http://gaultschool.org)). The GSAR was founded after the start of archaeological research at the Gault Archaeological Site and the organization has continued to manage and protect the site. Unlike El Pilar, the site has no visible architecture, grandiose pyramids, or imposing monuments. It is a deep, stratified site typical of the Paleoindian (8,800+ years BP) and Archaic periods (8,800-1,200 Years BP) in Central Texas (Figure 8). Given the nature of the remains, we are able to rely upon facts, information, and props when informing the public, rather than grandiose architecture.

Despite its lack of visible features (Figure 9), the Gault site is a significant archaeological find. Incised stones found at the site in Paleoindian strata are some of the earliest provenienced art in the Americas. Excavations of ca. three percent of the site have yielded 2.6 million artifacts including over 600,000 Clovis-age and ~150,000 Pre-Clovis artifacts (Wernecke and Collins 2015). A gravel floor representing the oldest excavated evidence for a dwelling in North America was found here as well as a possible mammoth kill (one of only 15 in the Americas [Grayson and Meltzer 2015]).

Gault is 40 miles north of Austin, Texas and five miles from Florence, a small rural community with a population of ~1200 with an annual per capita income of around \$19,000 (almost fifteen percent of the population is below poverty level). The next closest town is Salado, with a population of ~2100 and an annual per capita income of around \$54,000. From the beginning, our work at the Gault Site elicited interest from the communities of the area and, just as in Central America, there were some who thought that somehow, we were benefiting financially from the excavation. Tours for interested parties – at first *ad hoc* informal tours for various groups and later more professionally

## THE GAULT SITE, BELL AND WILLIAMSON COUNTIES, TEXAS



Author: Nancy Velchoff-Williams Date: 6/7/2017

### The Gault Site, Bell and Williamson Counties, Texas

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Document Name: The\_Gault\_Site\_Location

Coordinate System: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
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Figure 7. Location of the Gault Site and local communities. Produced by Nancy Velchoff (GSAR).



*Figure 8. Archaeologists from the New Hampshire State Conservation and Rescue Archaeology Program (SCRAP) uncover Clovis artifacts at the Gault Site. ©The Gault School of Archaeological Research*



*Figure 9. The north pasture of the Gault Site. Excavations were completed in 2013/2014 and subsequently backfilled, leaving no trace of the immense amount of archaeology that took place. ©The Gault School of Archaeological Research.*



designed and led tours – seemed a natural response. Signage was developed that highlighted the archaeological process and notable finds so that visitors could more easily envisage what was significant about the Gault Site. The first signs were portable and temporary and made use of real estate sign frames. This initial setup helped the staff figure out what worked and what did not, leading to the design of more permanent installations. The outreach goals for the Gault Site were to educate the local communities about archaeology, to inform them that archaeology is not just about far-off Maya temples, and that archaeological remains can be found in one's own backyard.

Encouraged, we expanded our tours (Figure 10) by targeting schools and we held several teacher's workshops at the site (Wernecke 2010). At one point our Board of Directors decided that we should charge for tours and we began asking for \$10/person for adult tours, but in keeping with our educational mission, tours for school groups remained free of charge.

In 2007, we received a grant from the Texas Historical Foundation that helped to produce a professional video about the peopling of the Americas and the Gault site. This 21-minute video was distributed was freely accessible to over 600 teachers and educational institutions. A grant from the Archaeological Institute of America helped put together a teacher's guide written by GSAR volunteers who were school teachers. Another grant made it possible for GSAR members to attend three annual teacher's conferences (Science, Social Science and Gifted & Talented) that collectively, were attended by over 15,000 teachers annually. In partnership with other local organizations interested in public education (the Texas Historical Foundation, Texas Archeological Society, TexasBeyondHistory.net, and the Shumla School), staff members worked a booth offering information on archaeological education programs throughout Texas with the theme of "Archaeology in Education." The potential audience was greatly expanded beyond those who were focused on the Gault site.



*Figure 10. One of the authors, D. Clark Wernecke stands in front of the permanent signage that illustrates the layers at the site and discusses stratigraphy to a tour group at the Gault Site. ©The Gault School of Archaeological Research*

Personnel at a local museum became interested in our project, applied for and received a grant to build a permanent museum display ([http://www.bellcountymuseum.org/Museum/exhibits\\_gault.html](http://www.bellcountymuseum.org/Museum/exhibits_gault.html)). Our input was requested on vetting and proofing the various displays and texts. The Museum staff, in collaboration with the GSAR, are currently involved in planning an expansion and update for this exhibit.

While we have never actively sought publicity through press releases or our university connections, we have been sought out by many media outlets. The GSAR's position has always been to cooperate in these public ventures while helping those responsible to shape messages about what real archaeologists do and why archaeology is important. Media appearances have been on NOVA, Scientific American Frontiers, and

the National Public Radio's Science Friday, as well as the dissemination of information in numerous print articles.

We have been concerned about our legacy in the area, and with good reason. It is not the scientific legacy but what our project will leave behind once we have ceased to work at Gault. A major question that looms is what is in our research for the local community. To this end, we work closely with the two nearby towns of Salado and Florence as a member of each of their Chambers of Commerce. With their input, we have considered short-term and long-term benefits. We distribute some of their tourist materials at the site, direct visitors to local businesses (e.g., we currently send hundreds of people to local restaurants), and help train their tourist information volunteers. The Gault site has received the status of a State Archaeological Landmark and it is in the process of receiving National Historic Landmark status which will serve as the focus for a roadside exhibit. Ultimately, we plan to build a roadside exhibit (Figure 11) and a small interpretive center at the Gault site, which would draw more visitors to the area as well as provide local employment.



*Figure 11. Rendering of a proposed Gault site roadside exhibit that will highlights its status as a state and national landmark. ©The Gault School of Archaeological Research*

The GSAR has partnered with two local museums, the Bell County Museum (north of Gault in Belton, TX) and the Williamson Museum (southeast of Gault in Georgetown, TX) to offer monthly scheduled tours of the site. The museums sell tickets and consolidate the tours and the GSAR staff give the tours. We split any profits with

Williamson Museum and the Bell County Museum has allowed all profits to go to the GSAR. Future plans for the interpretive center may involve one or both of these partnerships in order to open the site daily to the public.

We periodically meet with the volunteers who staff tourism information centers in the communities and we have banded together with other projects in Texas to build a joint marketing and education effort – a heritage trail system called Prehistoric Texas. Six other primary “destinations” (Ft. Worth Museum of Science and History, Dinosaur Valley State Park, Bosque Museum, the Waco Mammoth National Monument, Mayborn Museum Complex, and Bell County Museum) and a number of conventions and visitors bureaus formed a nonprofit cooperative venture, the Prehistoric Texas Education Initiative, which markets the trail. There is a website ([prehistorictexas.org](http://prehistorictexas.org)) with information about each of the stops and the organization distributes over 30,000 trail brochures a year through tourism information offices and other locations. The GSAR reaped some very tangible benefits from this program. Visibility made fundraising from private donors and grantmaking institutions easier. Another welcome outcome of this arrangement for GSAR was the contribution of volunteers. We have had over 2,300 people commit volunteer hours to the project, and in our lab alone, almost 13,000 hours of volunteered time have been racked up. These volunteers represent significant economic benefit to our public programs. A bonus from the volunteerism was our ability to find good staff. Outreach efforts were instrumental in attracting GSAR’s lab director and the majority of the staff began as volunteers while pursuing other archaeological research efforts.

## **AN OUTREACH FRAMEWORK**

While no two projects are alike, these examples provide two models of what can be achieved when different forms of outreach are implemented. Outreach should include both a short-term and long-term elements. For long-term projects to be sustainable, time and resources need to be dedicated to achieve lasting impact. The framework we

present below is intended to stimulate thought into types of outreach as much as it is to provide a guide for what we found works well.

### **Short-term Activities**

Engaging local communities in strategic activities, providing volunteer opportunities, and sharing the research agenda are all possible during the survey and excavation phases of a project. These approaches can easily become part of a long-term plan of public outreach, depending on the nature of the research. Many of these activities (Figure 12) are routinely practiced by almost every archaeologist.

### *The Internet*

Most archaeological companies, university departments, research institutes and projects have websites and social media platforms. These types of media create ideal opportunities for public outreach and engagement. While a cliché, with the click of a button, the internet can be used to reach a global audience. We argue, however, that this step is only an entry point in the public outreach toolkit. It is easy to post a sentence or a picture to one of these platforms and make the claim that you are reaching the public. However, the act of “posting” alone does not mean that the public is following you. How many archaeological institutes or companies are simply following each other on social media? While these media help the archaeological community to keep up-to-date on research, it does not guarantee that we are reaching a wider public. Social media can be a low-cost advertising solution, but it is not the best platform for presenting results. The GSAR is actively exploring the best way in which to disseminate results.

To be of value to public outreach, archaeologists must engage with their online audience in a meaningful way. A continued online presence should strive to reach out to interest groups and the wider population, inviting more followers. Interesting information, reflective summaries, annotated discoveries, and overview time lines will help in this effort. Virtual museums are now technically

feasible and can garner much interest. Such efforts may not directly benefit the local community, however.

### *Tours – An archaeological mainstay*

Site tours are a vital way to capture the imagination of the public and are one of the most direct and tangible ways to communicate the goals of archaeology. They provide a physical connection between the local community, the archaeological research of survey and excavation, and the archaeologists themselves. Every project consists of essentially two stories, the story of the archaeological project itself, and the one we interpret as archaeologists based on the data. The historic/prehistoric narrative of the site and the archaeological activities constitute part of the whole story. Indeed, tours can serve as multi-purpose educational experiences for the students and professionals participating in the project, as well as for visitors. The interaction among the various groups provides a unique context for learning. Archaeology is an apprenticeship discipline and we readily recognize the need for hands-on training in field techniques and procedures. But archaeologists rarely give the same thought to communication of the results through either presentation or scientific writing. Often regarded as “taking time away from more important research,” students and professionals can learn and hone their skills in communicating why their particular project is necessary and what it may mean to a larger audience. Interacting with visitors can bring up questions that not only test one’s ability to communicate clearly but also suggest new or different ways to view the data. A great example of student learning through outreach can be seen at Çatalhöyük (Tringham 2012).

### *Talks*

Giving talks, public lectures, and workshops are another valuable tool of outreach. Chiarulli (2016) makes the point that archaeological interpretation is an art. Archaeologists are storytellers who relate the story of what happened in the past and why it is important to listeners today. We can visit schools, clubs,

societies etc., in their settings as well as organize field trips for those same groups. Simply advertising the fact that your organization will provide speakers (in interviews, on your website, etc.) will bring a remarkable number of groups to your door. This publicity can facilitate the interactions among interested groups.

### *Posters*

Posters, like an advertising campaign, can grab the attention of the public. Simple but informative, posters with graphics, photographs, and clear information provide an easy way to communicate research activities, goals, and results. The GSAR project has put together mobile displays in several community museums using well thought-out graphics and displays. The GSAR has even reused posters done for professional venues like the SAA Annual Meeting - local museums, libraries etc. are often interested in displaying professionally-produced displays of archaeological information. These provide an ongoing source of involvement.

### **Long-term Activities**

Shifting towards long-term public outreach, scale becomes a central concern. Is the location large enough to support long-term investment? Can it support permanent displays? An interpretive center? Major infrastructure? Appropriate investments will require community support and maintenance. Initial set-up may depend on the project's short-time financing. Ideally long-term outreach projects should provide some benefits for the community as well as archaeology in general or the archaeological project. The El Pilar Project, for example, advised local residents on tourist craft sales, food preparation for tour groups, and trained professional tour guides. The Gault project has worked with the local Chambers of Commerce to steer visitors to local restaurants and stores, train tourism information personnel, and determine how they can profit from a local site that has world prominence.

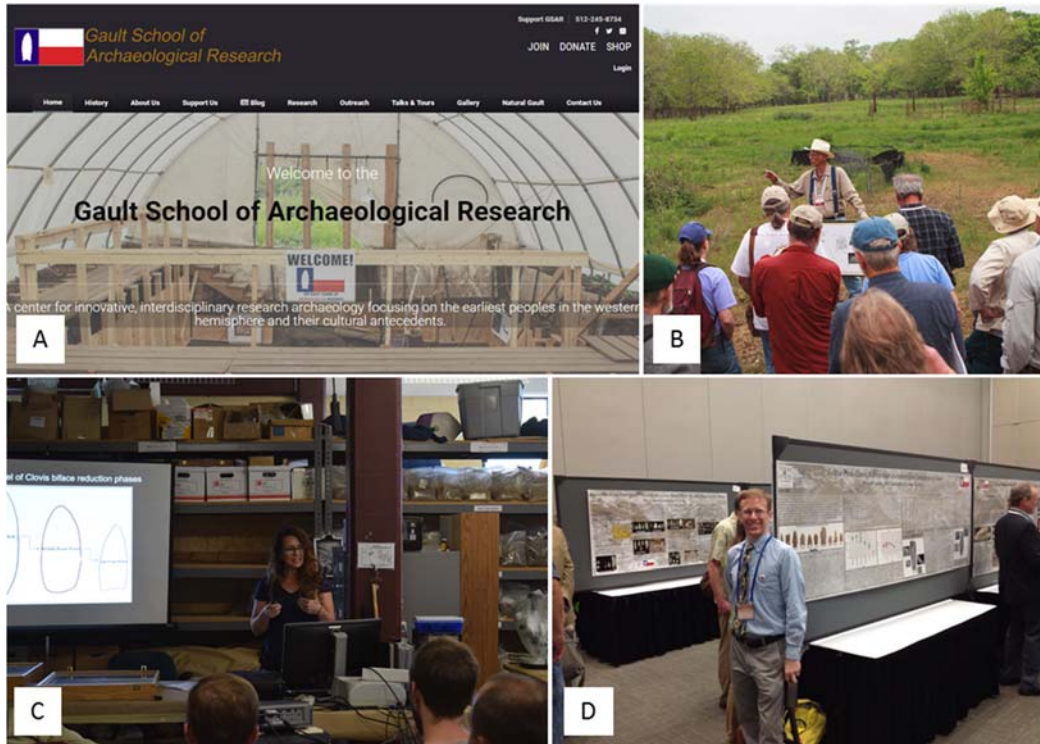


Figure 12. Short-term activities conducted by GSAR. A: The Gault School Website. B: Dr. Michael B. Collins, who is the chairman of GSAR and the principle investigator of the Gault Site, leads a tour of the site. C: Nancy Velchoff, a senior researcher and lab manager with GSAR and Texas State University, talks about her research into Clovis technology. D: Dr. Robert Lassen, a postdoctoral research associate with GSAR and Texas State University, presents his research in a poster at the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Meetings of the Society for American Archaeology, 2014 in Austin, Texas. ©The Gault School of Archaeological Research.

### *Permanent Displays*

These exhibitions can be as simple as a poster or as complex as a professionally constructed and permanent museum exhibit. The basis for such displays are the results of the field work. These displays could be mounted at the research site, a roadside park, or contributed to an existing museum display within the local community. While these could become expensive, funding can and should be built into our research proposals as part of the cost of conducting fieldwork.



### *Local Support Groups*

Long-term support groups can be vital to public outreach in the short-term and can build the foundation for continued education and economic prosperity in the long-term. Local organizations serve to bring together a community and these groups can be inspired to protect the cultural resources of the research site. Target groups, such as a “Friends of Your Project,” may be encouraged to support the archaeology directly and act to educate a wider audience. Eventually project archaeologists may move on to other work, but a community-based organization can continue to offer tours, and update displays and websites. Both BRASS/EI Pilar and GSAR have local support groups that continue to preserve and further their respective projects.

### *Interpretive Centers and Museums*

While perhaps difficult to achieve as they involve development and recurrent funding, specifically designed centers and museums will guide education and public engagement (Figure 13). Typically, these venues are envisioned to be on-site, located with access to the cultural resources themselves. The interpretive efforts that went into the short-term activities as well as the historical aspects of the research would be the focus of such infrastructure. Funding applications need to treat these projects like businesses, and include a consideration of overheads (i.e., staff and maintenance) and financial projections to avoid falling into disrepair.

The site itself could be made into an interpretive center with, depending on resources, the addition of signage, self-guided tour booklets, or downloadable apps. Rapid technological developments are increasing possibilities in this area (see [www.nextexithistory.com](http://www.nextexithistory.com) and [www.history.com/history-here](http://www.history.com/history-here) for two excellent examples).



Figure 13. Be Pukte Cultural center, El Pilar, Belize. This center is located on site. ©D. Clark Wernecke

## DISCUSSION

It is our position that there is an integral role for the public in any archaeological project. The projects we have been involved with and the framework we offer are examples of how to initiate this component of a research project. Our involvement with the public has taught us valuable lessons. First and foremost of these is that the public have a genuine interest and desire to learn about archaeology in all of its forms. The outreach projects at El Pilar and Gault were the direct result of public interest.

The BRASS/El Pilar project linked with the community, and with the annual Fiesta El Pilar, was able to raise interest in the site and its potential. The decade-long investment in the Fiesta (1994-2004) ensured that the project annually reached on average 2,000

people. Local community participation and tour guide education, as well as lectures in Belize and Guatemala, enlarged the scope of the outreach. These events were a collaborative effort and included all participants, from directors, students, and volunteers to the local people. The program was codified in the management planning process and in the management plans endorsed for El Pilar by the community and the governments of Belize and Guatemala.

Between 2008 and 2015, GSAR has interacted with over 40,000 people through speeches or tours. The majority of these events were led by one of about six full-time research staff who balanced this outreach with continuing investigations. Despite being open to the public only one day a month and by appointment, the Gault site currently receives more than 1,000 visitors a year, many of whom become members, contributors, and volunteers for the GSAR.

Along with these positive achievements, two very important aspects must be considered. The first is to be aware of your audience and communicate to the interests of that group. Second, in any form of outreach, the implementation is critical to its success. A well-thought out and prepared approach to the public will yield positive results. It is vital that outreach projects have a clear set of aims and objectives to attain the desired goals. The vast majority of archaeologists are conducting outreach, but we have to engage with such activities at the start of any archaeological project. The public want to learn and we should always provide a platform for teaching. This aspect requires shifting the framework of the archaeological project to include outreach activities as a fundamental part of our research. The framework proposed here has the potential to contribute to the funding of grant proposals where outreach is a criterion of evaluation. The development of educational programs and tourism can benefit society.

Returning to McGimsey's (1972: 5) statement, all archaeology and all research that we conduct is public. Moreover, while in some cases it may not seem obvious to the public how a statistical analysis of projectile points or pottery fragments is necessary or why the public should care, it is vital that the archaeological community explain how

research contributes to a greater understanding of human history. We are in the business of story-telling and every piece of research helps solve the puzzle. As we engage with our work, our passions need to be communicated to the public. This communication involves more than a dissemination of only the results. We need to think outside the box and communicate what we do, what it can tell us, and how it can benefit humans, not just with an expansion of knowledge, but with real, tangible, and even financial results that improve and enhance our communities. In many ways, this article presents a challenge to us, the authors, as we are still actively conducting research and outreach efforts at the Gault site with GSAR. The BRASS/EI Pilar project has demonstrably benefitted the community. The challenge now is to make a lasting impact on the communities that surround the Gault Site.

## **CONCLUSION**

If we, as archaeologists, are unable to communicate the value of our research, then we have only ourselves to blame. Archaeology can and does make a powerful contribution to our cultures, our societies, and to the economy. With the deep time depth, implications for adaptation, and reflection on climate change, archaeology provides a major opportunity to bring the academy to the public. The two case studies we have presented represent two very different projects but throughout the course of investigation and beyond, outreach has been a central objective, side-by-side with the research. The BRASS/EI Pilar and the GSAR projects continue to make long-term contributions, each with efforts to build and maintain a lasting presence for the purposes of the educational and economic wellbeing of the local community.

From understanding the Maya world to studying the first hunter-gatherer groups to enter the New World, our research is teaching us about what it means to be human. This story, one of adaptation, technology, and civilization building, gives us an identity and shared cultural experiences, and it enriches our knowledge about world prehistory. It can teach us about learning, about science and its application. This is a story that the public wants to hear, wants to be a part of, and one to which they want to contribute. We can enrich the communities in which we work culturally and economically. In turn

these communities can contribute to our work, not just economically, but with the knowledge and skills they have. Archaeology is public. Anything less and we do ourselves an injustice.

Ultimately, these efforts are not perfect; every day is a new learning experience in dealing with the public and we continue to learn along the way. We have found that short-term outreach and engagement are more easily accomplished, but it is well worth the effort to consider the long-term impact of our work. The framework we have laid out represents our attempt to inspire archaeologists to think about how they can reach out to the public and effectively communicate the value of our research. The achievement of these goals is the responsibility of every archaeologist.

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