

"Crow Rediscover a Piece of Their Homeland"

America's Best Idea at Bighorn Canyon

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ABSTRACT

Crow people tell stories about the significance of Bighorn Canyon but few of them have ever visited the area. As a result of the construction of the Yellowtail Dam and the creation of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area (BICA) in southern Montana and northern Wyoming, the United States Government eliminated Crow access to part of their traditional homeland. Inspired by Ken Burns' documentary "The National Parks: America's Best Idea," the National Park Service sponsored projects to engage underserved audiences in national park heritage. The 2009 Crow Archaeological Field Camp at BICA was made possible by this program and provided learning opportunities for recent high school graduates from the nearby Crow Reservation. This paper will explore how new field school methods based on the principles of ethnographic archaeology can provide a blueprint for the practical implementation of community-based archaeological practices.

La gente Crow cuenta historias acerca del significado de Bighorn Canyon, pero pocos de ellos han visitado el área. Como resultado de la construcción del dique de Yellowtail y la creación del Área Recreativa Nacional de Bighorn Canyon (BICA) en el sur de Montana y el norte de Wyoming, el gobierno de los Estados Unidos eliminó el acceso de tierra patria tradicional a los Crow. Inspirado por el documental de Ken Burns "The National Parks: America's Best Idea," el Servicio Nacional de Parque (NPS) financió proyectos para tomar en cuenta audiencias de poblaciones omitidas en herencia de parque nacional. El Campamento Arqueológico Crow de 2009 en BICA fue hecho posible por este programa y proveyó oportunidades de aprendizaje para los que recién se han graduado de la secundaria de la reserva india cercana. Este papel va a explorar como los métodos nuevos de escuela de campo basados en los principales de arqueología etnográfica puede proveer un diseño de la implementación de las prácticas de arqueología "community-based" (basado en comunidad).

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid to late 1980s, ethical issues and community-based approaches have become critical aspects of archaeological practice (Ascherson 2005; Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2008; Lightfoot 2005a; Stone 2006). As a result of these new, or revived, fields of thought, ethnographers and archaeologists have been increasingly interested in how they might combine efforts to produce knowledge in an ethical manner, called *ethnographic archaeology* by Quetzil E. Castañeda and Christopher N. Matthews (2008) in their book *Ethnographic Archaeologies: Reflections on Stakeholders and Archaeological Practices*. Ethnographic archaeology refers to "archaeological projects based in research and management of the past that have integrated ethnography into their core processes and dynamics as a strategic way to further develop archaeology as a reflexive and social science" (Castañeda and Matthews 2008:5–6). The Crow Archaeological Field Camp at the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area in southern Montana is one example of how a long-standing archaeological field project can promote carefully built relationships with indigenous communities and integrate ethnography into the "core processes" of the archaeological enterprise.

THE CROW ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD CAMP

As a result of the construction of the Yellowtail Dam and the creation of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area in southern Montana and northern Wyoming, the United States government eliminated Crow access to part of their traditional homeland. Crow people tell stories about the significance of Bighorn Canyon (located adjacent to the modern reservation boundaries), but few of them have ever visited the southern side of the recreation area. Inspired by Ken Burns's documentary series *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, the National Park Service sponsored projects to engage underserved audiences in the national park heritage. The 2009 Crow Archaeological Field Camp was made possible by this program and provided learning opportunities for recent high school graduates from the nearby Crow reservation by collaborating with the already established honors camp run through Little Bighorn College's Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Program. Not only did this five-day field camp provide opportunities for many Crow people to visit and tell stories about Bighorn Canyon, but collaboration between the camp's many partners provided a more holistic picture of Bighorn Canyon history for future generations. The Crow Archaeological Field Camp took place again in 2010 to great success, and we hope that it will continue in the future. This article will explore how new field school methods based on the principles of ethnographic archaeology can provide a blueprint for the practical implementation of community-based archaeological practices.

COLLABORATIVE, COMMUNITY-BASED ARCHAEOLOGY

A collaborative, community-based archaeological project is one in which research questions, field practices, data collection and analysis, and knowledge dissemination do not originate solely from archaeological practitioners in academic settings (Lightfoot 2005b; Marshall 2002; Smith et al. 2003). Instead, close collaboration between descendant indigenous communities, local communities, and archaeologists informs the research. Archaeologists can employ many strategies when pursuing a community-based approach. These strategies include civic engagement and social justice archaeology (Shackel 2007), activist archaeology (Gadsby and Chidester 2007; McGuire 2008), indigenous archaeology (Atalay 2006, 2007; Watkins 2000), and feminist archaeology (Conkey 2005), all of which may be termed *decolonizing* or *postcolonial* approaches (Nicholas and Hollowell 2007). By the same token, all of these methods beg the same question: Can a tool of colonialism ever be completely postcolonial (Atalay 2006)? In separate articles, both George Nicholas and Julie Hollowell (2007) and Sonya Atalay (2006) argue that archaeology can work toward being a decolonizing practice, and combining ethnographic archaeology with innovative field methods may be one way to implement this goal.

A considerable discussion surrounding community-based archaeological approaches in both the Americas (Kerber 2006; McDavid 2002; Million 2005; Nicholas and Andrews 1997) and elsewhere (Clarke 2002; Fredericksen 2002; Moser et al. 2003; Smith and Jackson 2006; Smith et al. 2003) has risen in recent discourse about the practice of doing archaeology. Archaeolo-

gists have debated issues such as the “promise and pitfalls of stewardship” (Wylie 2005) and the rise of indigenous archaeologies (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010; Croes 2010; McGhee 2008, 2010; Silliman 2010; Wilcox 2010), and a variety of projects have now been instituted that provide examples of how collaborative research can develop and work (Dongoske et al. 2000; Lightfoot 2005b; Moser et al. 2002; Smith and Burke 2007; Smith et al. 2003). Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is itself a new field of practice (Atalay 2007; Silliman 2008) that is situated in a wider theoretical framework that recognizes the value of not just diverse sources of information or a heterogeneity of perspectives (see Longino's [1995] theoretical virtues), but a “diffusion of power” in a postcolonial world (Lydon and Rizvi 2010). For many archaeologists, what such a project would look like, on the ground and in everyday practice, remains to be conceptualized and implemented. In this article, we describe the ways in which we have created and carried out just such a project by incorporating the ideas of collaborative archaeology (Lightfoot 2005b) and ethnographic archaeology (Castañeda and Matthews 2008).

AMERICA'S BEST IDEA: UNTOLD STORIES PROJECT

Our ability to engage in community-based research was greatly enhanced in 2009, when the National Park Foundation, with a grant of \$225,000 from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr., Fund, funded 35 projects to increase participation by traditionally underrepresented and underserved communities in individual parks. The Crow Archaeological Field Camp at Bighorn Canyon was one of those projects that formed part of a larger effort to increase the awareness of the vast educational resources embodied in the national parks, to revitalize connections to principles on which the parks were founded, and to remind people of public ownership of the parks. The funding was inspired by the Ken Burns documentary series *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, which has allowed audiences across the country to access the history of the national park system. The National Park Foundation's grant represents an additional series of shorter documentaries on community experience with the national parks focusing on *Untold Stories*.

FIELDWORK CONDUCTED AT BIGHORN CANYON

A large portion of our collaborative research project, “Exploring Historical and Social Landscapes of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem” is conducted in Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area (BICA). This work includes a 20-day archaeological field school with an emphasis on ethnography and Crow cultural history as well as the documentation of cultural landscapes. College students from 11 different institutions throughout the country have enrolled in the field school since its inception in 2005. Students learn how to map stone circles, record archaeological sites using both recreational grade and survey grade global positioning system (GPS) technology, recover surface artifact data, and perform limited excavations (Scheiber and Finley 2010). Outreach and educational programs as well as cultural resource management in the recreation area are also part of the research.



FIGURE 1. Crow STEM student Jordan Bends and supervisor Kerry Stewart map a tipi ring at the Two Eagles site.

WORKING WITH THE CROW

Over the last few years, project members have worked with the Crow in a number of ways. Project leaders have been involved with educational programs at the Pretty Eagle K-8 School in St. Xavier on the Crow Reservation. These trips have often entailed excursions to rock art sites in the area that are of cultural significance to the Crow (McCleary 2008).

In addition, a pre-session is held on the reservation before the beginning of the archaeological field school at Bighorn Canyon. During the pre-session, all of the field school students visit the reservation, sleep at the Pretty Eagle School, talk to students at the school about college and careers, speak with elders and Crow community members, and visit a number of cultural sites in the area.



FIGURE 2. Timothy McCleary giving tour to Pretty Eagle students at a site called Ammaaaxxaxiio in Crow, translated as “where they sharpen tools.”

Field school students are exposed to representations of the Crow in different museums such as the Plains Indian Museum at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, and the Chief Plenty Coups State Park museum in Pryor, Montana, on the Crow Reservation. They are encouraged to discuss representations of the Crow found at these institutions. On a more personal level, Crow families are invited to visit Bighorn Canyon, and students are encouraged to enroll in the archaeological field school. All of these activities help to foster enduring personal friendships between members of the field project and the Crow community, and these ties are reaffirmed at the annual Crow Fair. The Crow Archaeological Field Camp (part of the America’s Best Program) plays a large part in fostering these relationships, in addition to providing a forum for the sharing of knowledge among all of the participants. In addition to creating these personal relationships through spending time with Crow people and at Crow places, the archaeological field school students are assigned and discuss a variety of readings on Crow ethnography as well as articles such as Joe E. Watkins’s (2003) “Beyond the Margin: American Indians, First Nations, and Archaeology in North America” to help them understand ongoing relationships between archaeologists and indigenous peoples and to consider future directions in collaboration.



FIGURE 3. Indiana University field school student Zach Meyer talks to Pretty Eagle students during breakfast.

PROJECT TEACHING GOALS

The Crow Archaeological Field Camp itself has multiple teaching goals that include creating an inventory of surface cultural material, carrying out feature identification and documentation, and learning about stone tool manufacture. Just as important as these archaeological teaching goals are emphases on increasing the awareness of the possibilities of archaeology within career development for the Crow students and providing opportunities for Crow elders to discuss the Bighorn Canyon in Crow history and Crow social identity with a diverse group of people. Opportunities to discuss the history of the area are enhanced by field trips to places like the Hillsboro Ranch in the canyon and the Bighorn Medicine Wheel in the nearby Bighorn Mountains.

LEARNING FROM CROW ELDERS

To more fully incorporate Crow cultural history, several community elders were invited to Bighorn Canyon in 2009 and 2010 to talk about the cultural landscape and to relate specific Crow stories to archaeologically recoverable materials. After a full morning of archaeological activities, the field camp students typically gathered to listen and interact with the elders.

One such story told during these often scorching desert afternoons explains why the Crow began to use stakes to secure tipi edges after previously using large stones; the practice of using these stones created the stone circles that we find today. Hubert Two Leggins presented the following story of Big Metal in 2009.

Before the Crows received horses, they were camped south of an area called Hole in the Rock. Among the Crow was a young boy whose father had been killed in battle. The boy's mother remarried, and although the step-father treated his stepson well while they were in camp, the man was plotting to kill the boy. Taking his step-son hunting for bighorn sheep along the rims of the Bighorn Canyon, he stopped at a high place and pushed the boy off the ledge.

The step-father waited until dark and returned to camp. When the boy's mother asked what had happened to her son, the step-father replied that the boy had been sent home early. After four days of searching, the chief called off the search, deciding that the boy may have gotten hurt or stolen, but reassured his mother by saying that he was old enough. "If he was captured, the boy will return someday. He knows that he is a Crow."

Having been caught in a juniper tree, the boy was still alive. On the fourth night, he heard talking in Crow. Looking over he saw seven sheep discussing his plight. Four of the sheep were to carry the boy part of the way, but

he must keep his eyes closed. The biggest and strongest sheep with horns and hooves of steel, Big Metal, carried the boy to the precipice. When they reached the top, each imparted wisdom on the boy, telling him that the badger, stubborn and strong, would also teach him. For when the badger digs his claws into the ground, not even a bear could drive him away. This is why the Crow now use stakes to hold down a tipi cut from metal like that of the great sheep.

The sheep promised the boy that he would become a great leader and live to a very old age, but that he needed to go back to camp. They gave him dried sinew, told him to walk past his step-father, and throw it into his mother's fire. He listened to the sheep, and all they said came true. He became a great leader, taking the name Big Metal from the sheep, and lived to be so old that his skin would tear.

In addition to providing information that is relevant to the project's archaeological research goals, the Crow elders supply a powerful way for all involved to situate themselves in the historical landscape of the region. Joe Medicine Crow, the oldest living Crow male and the holder of an honorary doctorate in anthropology from the University of Southern California, had the following to say about the Crow homeland in 2010 at the Bighorn Medicine Wheel:

Some of you live around here, some at other places, but let me tell you where you are. You are right here in exactly the right place. Thus said the old chief to a party of trappers a long time ago. "White man, you have now come to my country, the Crow Country. It's a good country. . . . The land you see around here, walk around here, is sacred land. Treat it respectfully."

Well, today you are here near the very heart of that good country. At one time it stretched from Black Hills to the Rocky Mountains, Great Falls, Montana, now, Yellowstone Lake to Canada. Huge area. That's the Crow Country. At a treaty in 1868 they asked the Crow Chief, "What is your land?" And the chief by the name of Sits in the Middle of the Land said, "My land is where I set my tipi. One pole rests at the western foothills of the Black Mountains . . . Black Hills. One pole rests at the shore of the Big Lake in the mountains . . . Yellowstone Lake. One shore . . . one pole rests at the falls, the big falls of the big . . . Muddy Missouri. That's Great Falls, Montana. And one pole rests at the hills north of the present Montana town of Cut Bank. That is my land." Huge land. It's all gone now, just a small part, but we still have the very heart of it here.

The stories from elders such as Joe Medicine Crow, Hubert Two Leggins, Sarge Old Horn, Elias Goes Ahead, Mary Bear Cloud, and Alda Good Luck are invaluable to anyone who wishes to better understand Bighorn Canyon and its significance as part of the Crow traditional homeland. Several regional and local newspapers as well as public access television have featured our program, and copies of those reports and documentaries are available online to reach an even broader public. The title of this article, "Crow Rediscover a Piece of their Homeland," is in fact a headline from the *Sunday Billing Gazette* from Billings, Mon-



FIGURE 4. Patrick Hill gives a talk to the field school students on the porch of the Ewing-Snell Ranch.



FIGURE 5. Hubert Two Leggins (Crow Culture Director) converses with Cassity Bromley (Chief of Resources at BICA) about recently discovered tipi poles at Bighorn Canyon.

tana, on July 19, 2009. The Crow did not exactly rediscover their homeland, but were rather invited to visit a part of their cultural landscape that has been somewhat inaccessible to them, to learn from each other, and to share their stories.

THE CREATION OF A COMMUNITY-BASED ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

While it is helpful to others to outline our goals and successes, it is also necessary to discuss how a project went from humble community-based beginnings to a successful example of ethnographic archaeology in a field context. As so often happens in life and archaeology, the relationship between the archaeologists and the Crow descendant community started by luck. While at the 2004 Plains Conference in Billings, Montana, Laura Scheiber and Judson Finley started formulating plans to collaborate on a new research project focused on documenting the cultural landscape at Bighorn Canyon. Scheiber had recently begun a tenure track position at Indiana University, and Finley was finishing his dissertation at Washington State University. They had both worked in Wyoming and the surrounding states for almost 20 years, and from the beginning, they explicitly wanted to involve local communities and multiple stakeholders in their project. While at the conference, they had dinner with Kelly Branam, an Indiana University cultural anthropology graduate student who was in the middle of conducting her doctoral research on the Crow Reservation. The three realized that they were actually interested in many similar issues, although they were coming from different subdisciplinary backgrounds and using different methods. During the summer of 2005, the three of them met again on the front porch of the Ewing-Snell Ranch, property owned by the park service at Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. The archaeological field project

was clearly going to succeed, and they started discussing the possibility of incorporating an ethnographic component. They decided to begin simply by taking the field school students to the nearby reservation and by inviting Branam's friends and colleagues to come visit the canyon. These first contacts led to the establishment of the yearly pre-session for the archaeological field school, participation in field trips and lectures at the Pretty Eagle K-8 school, Crow student enrollment in the field school, documentation of additional archaeological sites in the Crow homelands, the Crow Archaeological Field Camp, and increasing participation of Crow families in the "core processes" (Castañeda and Matthews 2008) of the Exploring Historical and Social Landscapes of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem archaeological research project.

FUTURE GOALS

We hope not only to continue working with the Crow as part of the ongoing archaeological field school at Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, but also to continue conducting the five-day Crow Archaeological Field Camp. Above all, we will continue to build bridges between archaeologists and local communities while strengthening our interpretations by basing them on a combination of archaeology, ethnography, and oral histories (Castañeda and Matthews 2008; Watkins 2003). In addition, we wish to rewrite park narratives to include Native voices and to foster future training opportunities at Bighorn Canyon for Crow students. All of these activities will affirm our dedication to practicing an ethical, ethnographic, and community-based archaeology.

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Notes

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