

Archaeology - Rocking Cs

Date : July 10, 2013

The archaeology of Rocking C's: a lens on human history

Slides of the talks are available at - <http://chorography.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/545>

There's a gallery of some photos I took during the week at - <http://www.archaeographer.com/Archaeology/Rocking-Cs-2013/>
(same password as this page)

Rocking C's Ranch July 2013 - an exploration of the ranch's archaeology as a means of thinking about some of the great topics of human history. By drawing comparisons and contrasts with some famous and not-so-famous archaeological cases worldwide, the evocative traces of thousands of years of human experience in this marvelous landscape are starting points for some trips through world archaeological history, taking in the ice age art of Europe, farmers at Stonehenge, the early cities of the Near East, warriors of the Scandinavian bronze age, the ancient Greek Mediterranean, Puebloan communities of the American south west.

For me, archaeologists don't discover the past so much as work on what remains. The past, and especially its tangible remains, is becoming more and more important, because it offers orientation and a source of meaning in a world of runaway change. This means we are all now archaeologists in some way: many of us collect old things; we visit the remains of the past on a vacation, in a museum or art gallery; all of us organize our memories; many of us have an interest in family and community history.

Informal, open and two-way talks, based around some great stories, cases, conundrums.

Four topics to organize this adventure in deep time:

Home; Craft; Food; Place

Each topic starts at the Ranch and an aspect of its archaeology, explores some of the context in North America for orientation, then moves to some different places, with some great stories to help think through the topic. Typically each starts quite familiar and ends up very much a surprise. All involved field trips too - local teepee circles, a quarry for stone to make tools, a rock shelter, and something of a conundrum - "Cooler Cave", full of bison bones.

Introduction.

Why archaeology and what is it?; the archaeology of the Ranch; Archaeology: place and collection; the archaeological imagination (we all use it everyday); and keeping a human perspective on a runaway world of change.

A fresh review of some of the big events of human history in relation to the archaeology/history of North America. Some definitions, dates and reference points to help orient us. Some timelines and maps of human history.

James Hutton and deep time.

Monday. Home.

Building homes when you're on the move, and how . Some of the most evocative of archaeological traces of the past on the Ranch are the teepee circles. Compare: Chaco Canyon (the American South West); Stonehenge and Salisbury Plain (the most strange of built environments for a farming community). Topic: the enduring attraction of home in helping us make sense of the world.

Tuesday. Craft.

Stone tools: from deep prehistory to the industrial world. There is a chert quarry close to the Ranch. Native American material culture and its history. Compare: an ancient Greek perfume jar; a Wedgwood teapot. Topic: art, craft, industry, science and deep knowledges of making.

How did design and manufacture change with the industrial revolution? We'll look at the history of design and making in different materials and how this can help us think about creativity, innovation, technology and the arts. Here MS will draw on his experiences of working in clay (Stanford has a replica Roman pottery kiln), as well as in the design school at Stanford.

Wednesday. Food.

Following the bison and knowing the land. Native American farmers and hunters. Compare: farming villages and an early city (Ur) in the ancient Near East. Topic: the origins of farming - they're not what you might think; food, sustenance for the soul, is always more than nutrition.

Our contemporary fascination, indeed obsession with cuisine reflects the way food, for people, has never been just a matter of nutrition. It is increasingly clear that the adoption of agriculture did not happen for what we would today call economic reasons related to labor, production, domesticated plant and animal species, but was much more connected to the way people thought of the spiritual world and our relationships with land and property. And the differences between agriculture, hunting and gathering have been overdrawn.

Thursday. Place.

Rock art and sacred places. A visit to a painted rock shelter on the Ranch. Context: rock art and place in native North America. Compare: rock art in bronze-age Tanum, Sweden (World Heritage site and densest concentration of rock art in the world); Dunstanburgh, a medieval castle in the north of England (a spectacular coastal setting). Topic: the importance of stories told about where we are and have been.

There are some remarkable convergences in how and why people through the ages have painted and carved rock outcrops and caves, working stone in the land. Some psychological factors to this have been identified and are quite convincing (certain kinds of shamanic experience). Also a common factor is narrative - telling and marking stories using the land itself. The example of the great Lancastrian stronghold at Dunstanburgh illustrates this in a surprising way.

Reading, resources, follow-up.

Some suggested reading.

On the archaeology of North America:

David Hurst Thomas. Exploring Ancient Native America: An Archaeological Guide. Routledge, 1999.

and also Exploring Native North America. Oxford University Press, 2000. Both these are organized around great archaeological sites and are very attractive. David has written some of the best textbooks about archaeology available in the US today.

Brian Fagan. Ancient North America. Thames and Hudson, 2005. The most recent edition of Brian's textbook treatment. He's a great popular writer and this is the best overview by far.

Here is a chapter from Gary Feinman and Douglas Price's book called "Images of the Past"

[Feinman-Price](#)

Lou Ann De Cunzo and John H. Jameson (eds). Unlocking the Past: Celebrating Historical Archaeology in North America. University of Florida Press, 2005. Historical archaeology is booming in the United States, and this is a reasonably good introduction to some of the agendas.

Montana has a great web-based set of resources for archaeology and history, organized through the Montana Historical Society. The online textbook is very good:

<http://mhs.mt.gov/> - [\[Link\]](#)

<http://mhs.mt.gov/education/textbook/Introduction.asp> [\[Link\]](#)

The best general book about world archaeology is

Chris Scarre (ed). The Human Past: World Prehistory and the Development of Human Societies. Thames and Hudson, 2013.



hand print (upside down in red ochre) in a rock shelter on Dry Range



Jeff looking for Cooler Cave



A teepee circle



the map of the Ranch in the lodge