

SITE

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prehistoric human occupation ranged from about 8700 to 700 years before present but that could change with the UNR Leonard Rockshelter excavation project.

Dr. Geoffrey Smith described his project in a proposal for The Archaeological Conservancy (TAC), owner of the site south of Lovelock. Smith is an Associate Professor and Executive Director of the UNR Department of Anthropology's Great Basin Paleoindian Research Unit.

"It (the proposal) lays out the reason why we are returning — to evaluate an old claim that the site contains a Clovis-aged occupation," he said last week. "If that is correct, it would be a really big deal. However, with the only information collected by the site's original excavators, we have no way of knowing."

PRIVATE PRESERVE

To protect the site for such research, TAC bought 640-acres of private land in 2002 from the Santa Fe Pacific Gold Corporation, said Cory Wilkins, Western Regional Director for TAC. Those interested in Leonard Rockshelter must contact the group and request a tour of the site.

Leonard Rockshelter is part of a series of caves and shelters in the Humboldt Range. Shelters and caves were eroded by the wave action of Lake Lahontan. Scientists say the giant lake reached its final highest level around 15,300 years ago then gradually receded leaving behind the evidence of prehistoric human occupation.

After guano miners found artifacts in 1936, Leonard Rockshelter was excavated in 1937 and 1950 by archaeologist Robert Heizer of the



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University of California, Berkeley. He unearthed a "modest assemblage" of stone, fiber and wooden artifacts including wooden atlatl foreshafts, obsidian flakes and projectile points. Obsidian flakes were recovered by Heizer from below a layer of bat guano radiocarbon dated to around 13,000 years ago, Smith said.

If the age of obsidian flakes and other artifacts found below the 13,000 year old material is confirmed, that could indicate the rockshelter was inhabited prior to that time during the terminal Pleistocene Epoch. The Pleistocene Epoch, otherwise known as the Ice Age, lasted from about 2.6 million

years ago to 11,000 years ago and was followed by the current Holocene Epoch.

"If clear evidence of human occupation (e.g., obsidian flakes) does exist in a primary context below deposits dating to 13,000 years ago, then the site could join the growing list of Clovis-aged (and perhaps, pre-Clovis) occupations in North America," Smith said.

BETTER SCIENCE

Leonard Rockshelter artifacts were some of the first to be radiocarbon dated, a new research method at the time. Wooden foreshafts that served as part of a weapon

system tipped with chert or obsidian projectile points were directly dated to around 7900 years ago placing them near the beginning of the middle Holocene Epoch. Smith said radiocarbon dating has improved so new dates on sediment and artifacts should be more accurate than Heizer's earlier estimates.

In his research proposal, Smith details the nature of the evidence he is looking for:

"The primary goal of our proposed work is to test the hypothesis that Leonard Rockshelter contains evidence of human occupation dating to the terminal Pleistocene. Evidence needed to support this hypothesis includes artifacts or features of unquestionable human origin situated at the same depth or below organic material (guano, charcoal, wood, etc.) radiocarbon dated to the terminal Pleistocene."

Smith said his team will excavate smaller increments of sediment in some of the four trenches dug earlier by Heizer's team. A large block of roof fall, from the cliff above the rockshelter, may be broken up and removed so the ground below can be excavated, Smith says in his proposal.

GUARDIANS NEEDED

Meanwhile, Wilkins would like to recruit local volunteers, known as site stewards, to help him keep an eye on the place. Site stewards visit TAC preserves and report any threats to the sites.

Vandalism and theft can destroy unique evidence of ancient human history. The group's objective is to preserve the Leonard Rockshelter and other sites for further research.

"The site is fragile and susceptible to looting," Wilkins said. There can be big penalties for looting

or damaging archaeological sites but they vary from state to state, he said.

Wilkins said he's looking for more sites in need of protection. TAC buys archaeological sites on private property that would otherwise be paved over and destroyed by modern development.

"Right now, my push is Great Basin archaeology," he said. "We're looking at anything out here but, the challenge in Nevada is there's so much public land. The BLM, Forest Service and other public agencies own 82 percent of Nevada so that limits private property that's for sale that has archaeology on it. Lovelock Cave is BLM property so BLM archaeologists manage that site."

Wilkins said he'll give tours of Leonard Rockshelter upon request. There are petroglyphs on layers of tufa "pillows" covering parts of the cliff above and fallen boulders below conceal dark chambers that could still hold undiscovered clues about the shelter's former inhabitants.

Smith said petroglyphs are difficult to age but researchers believe the Leonard Rockshelter motifs were carved sometime in the last 4,000 years due to their elevation. In earlier times, the shelter floor was lower and carved areas would have been more difficult for the artists to reach.

The view from Leonard Rockshelter includes other rock outcroppings and what from a distance look like more rockshelters. Wilkins said he's got more exploring to do in Pershing County.

Those interested in serving as site stewards or a tour of the Leonard Rockshelter are asked to get in touch with Wilkins. His email is tac-west@comcast.net or call him at (530) 592-9797.

ONLINE

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wild horse and burro program including roundups, short and long-term care and feeding of animals in holding facilities.

Those interested in adopting or bidding on a wild horse or burro can see a photo gallery of a some of the available animals and submit an application online. The ONC lists adoption and sales events and the requirements to adopt or buy an animal. Applicants need a fenced corral, shelter structure, horse trailer, be at least 18 years old and have no animal abuse convictions.

The public can also view animals in person at one of the BLM's off-range corrals or training facilities. Wild horses and burros more than 10 years old and those not adopted after three special adoption events are auctioned during competitive bidding sales. The minimum price to adopt or buy an is \$125 for all animals but prices can be higher if animals are halter trained.

Adopters can acquire up to four animals per year while those buying animals may be permitted to purchase per year according to the BLM website. Adopters must wait a year for title to the animals while buyers receive immediate animal ownership from the BLM.

Adopters and buyers must sign an agreement that animals will not

be sold for slaughter, used as bucking stock or processed into commercial products. By law, the BLM is not allowed to sell wild horses or burros to "kill buyers" that transport animals to slaughterhouses in Mexico or Canada.

At this point, American slaughterhouses are not permitted to slaughter wild horses or burros.

Upcoming adoption and bidding events at BLM facilities and events around the country are listed on the website. For example, special adoption events were held in January at the BLM's Palomino Valley Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Center north of Reno and, last week, a competitive bid adoption event was held at the Mule Days annual festival in Bishop, California.

On June 2 and Oct. 20, 2018, the public can bid on wild horses and burros trained by inmates at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center in Carson City according to the website.

As for how many animals will be featured in the Online Corral photo gallery, BLM staff will choose according to the animals' appearance and availability for sales and adoption events.

"Staff at each facility that uses the Online Corral will select animals based on conformation and animals from prior events that

were not selected for adoption and requests from Eastern facilities," BLM spokesperson Lesley Elser said. Palomino Valley Center animals will be featured based on that criteria but "some ages and types (ie geldings) may not be available at all times."

Elser confirmed that than 10-year-old animals and others who have failed to be adopted during three adoption events are offered to the highest bidders in online auctions. Animals not adopted or sold eventually end up at long-term holding facilities when there's space available, she said.

"The BLM makes every attempt to offer animals for adoption multiple times as we try to find them good homes," Elser said. "There is no set time frame for when an unadopted horse is transported to an off-range pasture. It is determined by space at off-range pastures and the traits commonly preferred by adopters as well as the time a horse has been in a corral."

Of the horses and burros featured in last week's photo gallery, one is a two-year-old mare removed from the Owyhee Herd Area north of Winnemucca in November, 2016. The "roan red" mare named Rachael was halter trained at the Chugwater Training Facility in Wheatland, Wyoming and sold for \$515 during the recent

online auction according to the BLM. A few other wild horses removed from the Owyhee HA were also trained and sold during the auction.

For the Online Corral, Wyoming wild horse trainer Steve Mantle provides various photos along with a description of each animal he has given basic training including the mare from Nevada.

"Rachael is not an easy horse to work with and you will have to take your time but she is so very athletic and smart that someone will end up with a super nice horse they can go any direction with from the branding pen to the trail ride to

ranch work or maybe even some rodeo," he said.

Wild horses have been trained for cattle ranching, trail riding, law enforcement and border patrol. Some have successfully competed in dressage, rodeo and other horse events. Burros can be trained as pack animals and make good companion animals according to the BLM.

The Online Corral is a work-in-progress. Last week, due to a glitch in the system, some bidders were incorrectly told they were the highest bidders in the recent wild horse and burro auction.

Lovelock Review-Miner

Winnemucca Publishing, Inc.

Publisher: Peter Bernhard

The Lovelock Review-Miner (USPS 463-940) is published weekly for \$33.70 per year in-county; \$45 per year out-of-county by the Lovelock Review-Miner, 1022 S. Grass Valley Rd., Winnemucca, NV 89445. Periodical mailing paid at Lovelock, Nevada.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Lovelock Review-Miner, 1022 S. Grass Valley Rd., Winnemucca, NV 89445.

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