

Partners in Cultural Resources: 2016 highlights

Did you know the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for managing archaeological and historic sites on public lands? Rock shelters, quarries, campsites, village sites, and rock art sites; lighthouses, ranches and homesteads, railroad logging camps, Civilian Conservation Corps sites and many roads and trails – the BLM must take care of these important but fragile resources in order to conserve their significant cultural, scientific, educational, traditional, and recreational values.

In the BLM's Burns District, the Cultural Resources program has long been dedicated to a number of special projects with support from and in partnership with universities like University of Oregon, Oregon State, and University of Nevada-Reno; groups like the Archaeological Society of Oregon (ASCO) and Oregon Archaeological Society (OAS); and many interested locals.

This summer, in early June, 30 volunteers from ASCO met up with BLM archaeologists on a tour and survey of three sites in the Fields, Oregon area. On the first day of the tour, the group visited an old (at least 7,000 years) rock art site with pecked images in the face of a low basalt rim. An ancient waterfall divides the rim into two halves and was likely a very important place for ancient inhabitants. The group also visited a prehistoric site dating to about 1500 AD and spent an hour gridding the surface, looking for artifacts that are hallmark to that time period. The following day, the group caravanned to a 12,000 year old site on the Alvord Desert, spent several hours gridding, and ultimately found artifacts that indicated the site is situated on a former shoreline of Lake Alvord. The tour with ASCO was a resounding success for the volunteers and, at the same time, helped the BLM better understand the history of the Fields area.

In mid-June, 17 local and OAS volunteers teamed with the BLM on the 'Clovis Quest' survey. Clovis Quest is an annual effort – going on 16 years – dedicated to the search and location of Clovis spear points and sites. One Clovis spear point, broken during manufacture, was found, along with many other spear and arrow points. The ancient Clovis culture is believed to be about 13,000 years old. Southeast Oregon was occupied by Clovis hunters at the end of the Ice Age (when this part of Oregon was much wetter and cooler and glaciers topped Steens Mountain).

Starting in late June and lasting for a month, the University of Oregon will be excavating at Rimrock Draw Rockshelter in the northwest part of the District. Rimrock Draw has evidence of ancient Americans that may date as early as 15,800 years ago. It may be one of the oldest sites in North America and the University of Oregon and Burns BLM have been working together there since 2011. This summer the partners plan to dig various excavation units down to the bedrock in order to substantiate dates of the site's earliest inhabitants.

The vast public lands managed by the BLM feature some of the most significant and spectacular evidence of the 10,000+ years of human prehistory in the western United States and Alaska. These lands also count among the world's very best outdoor laboratories for studying the fossilized remains of plant and animal life, which span from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of millions of years in age. Discovering, studying, and understanding the evidence of past human influences provide us with important lessons about how we should be using our lands today.

