

## Isabell Villasana—Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field Scholarship 2019 Final Report

The world of archaeology as I have known it throughout my undergraduate education has been one of lab coats, tiny vials, and harsh florescent lighting. This summer, however, with the financial support of the Jane C. Waldbaum Field Scholarship, I was privileged to leave the lab. This summer I traded my lab coat for hiking boots, my tiny vials for a tape measure, and the harsh florescent lighting for the thunderous desert sky of the Kumeyaay Reservation (La Posta Band of Mission Indians) in the mountains of Eastern County San Diego. For confidentially purposes I am unable to disclose identifying site information or offer site photos, however I am at liberty to discuss the general activities of the field school.

Unlike most archaeological field schools, this field school was oriented towards CRM (Cultural Resource Management) archaeology. Most significantly this meant no digging. Instead, for the month of July, myself and about 20 other students worked together to prepare 10x10 meter grid units over brush, sand, and red ant colonies for pedestrian foot surveying. Hazards were comically abundant at this site between the rattle snakes, lighting, heat, and humidity. Humor and proper caution provided our defense to these conditions. Once the grids were laid, we split into three groups, Earth, Wind, and Fire, to begin locating and flagging artifacts for recording. Lining up along the Southwest corner of each square, we crawled along each of our transects (in attempted unison) and began flagging stone tools, ceramics, and hazards to avoid.

While I was initially disappointed that we would not excavate, the richness of artifacts scattered across the surface defeated those feelings within the first day. This site is a rarity in North American and Native American Archaeology as (1) the Kumeyaay Reservation rests on the ancestral lands of the Kumeyaay tribe (2) the reservation is largely undeveloped and archaeologically undisturbed and (3) the tribe is the authority on the archaeological project. All of these factors have lead to an almost unparalleled state of surface preservation in North America.

The majority of these artifacts are likely a thousand years old and ranged in use and materials. Common artifacts included small flakes, pottery sherds, and milling tools such as stone metates and manos. Once located in the transect we called either the Native American Monitor or our field school archaeologists to confirm that the artifact was in fact an artifact and not an oddly shaped piece of quartz. Watching your “artifact” be tossed aside was a humbling experience that refined my and everyone else’s pattern recognition. After identifications, in alternating roles, I and my group-mates (Team Fire) took a photo, physical description, and position in relative space of all 8 or 68 artifacts within our unit. Among what we surveyed, my favorite type of artifact to document were obsidian flakes. Obsidian is not local material in this area and must therefore be retrieved from a great distance away. The existence of these flakes shows the astounding reach of trade networks maintained by the Kumeyaay’s ancestors.

Day in and day out this work was physically exhausting, however, I can say in utmost sincerity that I would go back and do it again. As my first field experience, this school has shown me that I am physically capable of enduring whatever taxing elements are thrown at me. Additionally, this field school has helped me decide that I would like to pursue North American and California archaeology because there is tangible social value to California and North American Archaeology. The collections I have worked on thus far have been removed from living people. While they hold inherent value to national identities and humanity, the

significance of each project can seem far removed in the process. Often, I would find myself questioning if this was the best use of time in contributing towards American society.

Working under the Kumeyaay tribe has exposed me to archaeology that is close to people. In doing so I have become acutely aware of CRM firms in the United States that ignore the ethical responsibilities of archaeology. While there are many avenues and specialities to pursue in archaeology I believe that this field school has help me identify CRM and North American Archaeology as specific avenue were I may follow my passion for archaeology in a way that aids those leading the fights against ongoing injustices and colonial legacies. I am grateful to the Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship for enabling me this opportunity and journey of professional/academic discovery.