

The Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project 2019 Field Season



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Prior to this past July, I have wanted to attend an archaeological field school for almost three years. Fortunately, I was able to participate in The Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project through Southern Oregon University with Chelsea Rose. The field school focused on researching the Chinese communities that were present in Oregon, not only to help understand and share their stories, but to add their stories into the history of Oregon's development. I found this field school to be special because we were able to research four different sites across Oregon, versus focusing on one.



Scenery from the hike on the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument



Hiking up with gear



Buck Rock tunnel (West portal)



Sign posted near Buck Rock tunnel west portal

The first site we worked on was in Ashland, Oregon, at the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument for six days. Everyday we hiked in almost two miles, sometimes with gear. This hike was so beautiful, and even though it was a tough hike, I was sad when I was walking down it for the last time. I haven't hiked much over my life, so this was a treat for me. At this site, we explored Buck Rock Tunnel, an incomplete railroad tunnel from 1883-1884. At the time, the Chinese would have been using a Burley Drill, an exciting new technology ran by steam, and dynamite to carve out the tunnel. The rock would have been wheeled out by hand to form the railroad grade. It was amazing to see firsthand the built environment the Chinese made.



Fellow student and I working on our first test unit of the season!

Our goal for this project was to survey, both pedestrian and metal detection, and test the nearby land to potentially locate habitation and activity areas the construction crew would have had while they lived there. I was able to learn how to use a Trimble for mapping a grid used for laying out the test units, which were also mapped in. I was able to experience drones firsthand at this site because we needed aerial photographs. There are a lot of programs and little details involved in using drones, and I may not be able to do what we did at the site on my own, but now I am familiar with it. The environment at this site was filled with trees, brush, and grass, a typical forest environment. Below the surface there were lots of large roots, with angular rocks, and a clay-loam soil. This slowed down our progress, but we completed the number of test units we needed, so it was a success.



Myself sitting among a field of flowers found while hiking to the east tunnel portal



Myself in front of the east tunnel portal

After we completed our tasks, we took an adventure to visit the other end of the tunnel. Total hiking distance for the day was six miles! We could not go in the tunnel because the entrance was partially collapsed, and there is a bat colony currently living there. We did not want to introduce anything to their habit that may harm them. This wouldn't be our last hike in the mountains. On the last day we were up there, we opened up for the public to come and learn about the history and the work we have been doing up there. The tours sold out, and the people were very happy to be there. We had one gentleman perform a song he wrote in remembrance of the Native Americans with his flute, which was a pleasant ending to our work at this site.

This first week was the most difficult for me because I was surrounded by so many new people, and I needed to complete tasks in front of them. Surprisingly, despite me loving archaeology, I had never dug a hole, and therefore, did not know how to use a shovel. I was

worried that people would give me a hard time or judge me, but that didn't happen. For the first time in my life, I felt welcome, and felt that I belonged. We encouraged each other, and pushed each other to keep trying. We taught each other things from our experiences and skill sets, and it was wonderful to see and be apart of. Overall, I would say I am confident in starting my own 50 by 50 centimeter test unit, and bringing the unit down properly!

We had a two day break in Ashland, in which many of us used to spend in town, do laundry, and pack up. Ashland was a cute little town, filled with wildlife, nature, and Shakespeare! I learned that Ashland was home to the big Shakespeare festival I've heard about over the years. We did not get to see any shows, but it was fun to walk around downtown Ashland and shop. There was a good ice cream shop, and I probably tried almost every flavor!

From Ashland, our crew drove east to John Day, Oregon. Our first site was excavating a once booming China Town, known as the Kam Wah Chung Heritage Site. Our unit placement was determined by ground penetrating radar (GPR) conducted the year before. We opened up three units, and rediscovered hundreds of artifacts. Although most of the artifacts were tiny fragments, they revealed a great amount of information in the field. From historical photos, we know there were once several other buildings here. We found dozens of cut nails confirming there were buildings here. Some of the other artifacts were found include faunal remains, olive glass, a medicine bottle fragment, metal fragments, a bone die, Chinese brown glazed stoneware fragments, wintergreen, bamboo bowl, and four seasons porcelain fragments, and more. I could only imagine what will come out of the lab over the coming months.



Kam Wah Chung Heritage Site



Crew chief and I starting to measure the first strata for sketching



Fellow student and I screening dirt

The challenging aspects of this site's environment was the intense heat combined with the gravel and asphalt reflecting more heat.

Since the site was basically reduced down to a parking lot, there were lots of cobbles and rocks we needed to dig through. On the plus side, the soil was sandy, so that helped make digging a little easier. Despite all of this, my interest for our unit kept me going and ready every day. Our unit wasn't the typical one by one meter, but instead a 50 centimeter by two meter trench. We wanted to capture the beginning of what looked like a possible



pond feature from the GPR. By the end of this site, I completed my first unit! At this point I also learned a more in depth process of sketching in the strata of a unit. It is more difficult than I originally thought because you need to train your eyes to see soil changes. I got the hang of it pretty quickly, and by the time we got to our last site, I was confident sketching in the strata. We were not sure how far we should bring the unit down, but I noticed something unique at 70 centimeters below datum (cmbd).

As we dug further down, more cobbles appeared and at one point every rock I pulled out had a white residue on the bottom. This white residue is known as calcium carbonate, a mineral deposit that develops after a large flood from the water. If all these rocks were facing down, which they were, that indicates there has not been a ground disturbance since the flood. This flood would have happened long before the Chinese would have arrived in the later 1800's. I learned this information back in Fort Vancouver Washington, and I was able to share this information with my crew. Discussion with Chelsea and other archaeologists that were on site that day, led us to believe we reached the bottom of any cultural material. The prior level was sterile, but we were looking for that pond looking feature found in the GPR. I thought this moment was special because we all have our own skills, experiences, and knowledge that helps us solve questions together.



One of the rocks with calcium carbonate

For this site we also had a public day, in which myself and another student lead. I was very happy to see so many people interested in the history and work we were doing. About 110 people came by! The public day also boosted my confidence because I was very uncomfortable with speaking to large crowds. I am glad my job for the day was speaking to the public because I take those skills and facts out into my everyday life. I share with others the work we did, and what we learned from it. I would have never had the confidence to do so without this field school, but without the public days too. It was wonderful that we had the opportunity to share this knowledge while the field school was actively going because that information doesn't deserve to be confined to a small population. These stories are our history!



Fellow Students, Chelsea, and myself at Kam Wah Chung during the public day

Our last two sites were looking at the archaeology of Chinese mining in the Malheur National Forest. The Passport in Time project came through and cleared the brush, and flagged the pins from the metal detector survey prior to our crew arriving. Last year, several test units were dug, and more were done this year too. The goal of this site was to get a better understanding of how the land was used and what happened there. To begin, some students continued working on a unit that was started last year, some students started working on a new area, and some worked on mapping. I was on the mapping crew!

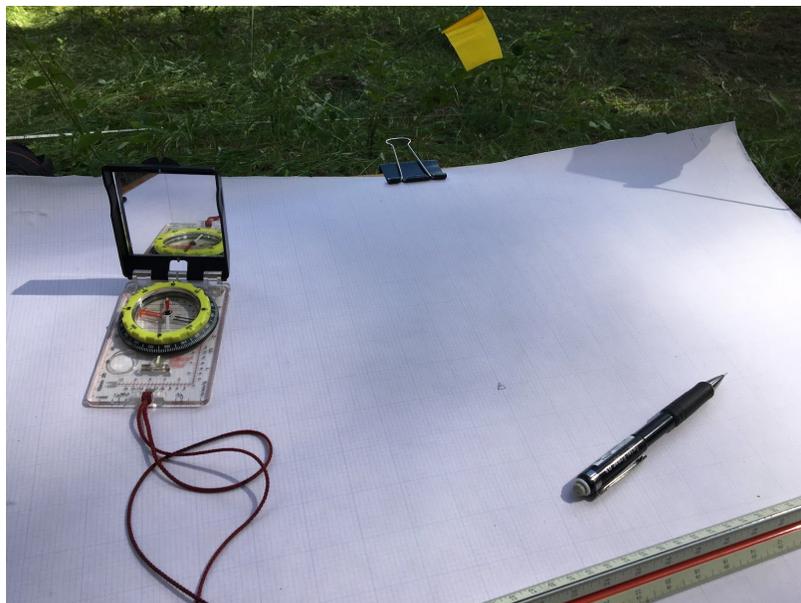


I was very fortunate to learn how to map a site by hand using an automatic level, stadia rod, tripod, compass, and a laser measuring tool. Mapping by hand takes up some time, but it is



more accurate than using more modern GPS systems. For example, last year at the site the GPS mapping failed, probably because the site is deep in the forest. Mapping by hand ensured that we had a permanent map of the site for sure this time. In addition, this site has very unique topography that would not fully be captured by GPS. Our team spent three days mapping this site. Because of the topography, we needed to have several dozen data points, and this took time. Once we felt that we had an accurate representation of the site, we started

making the map.



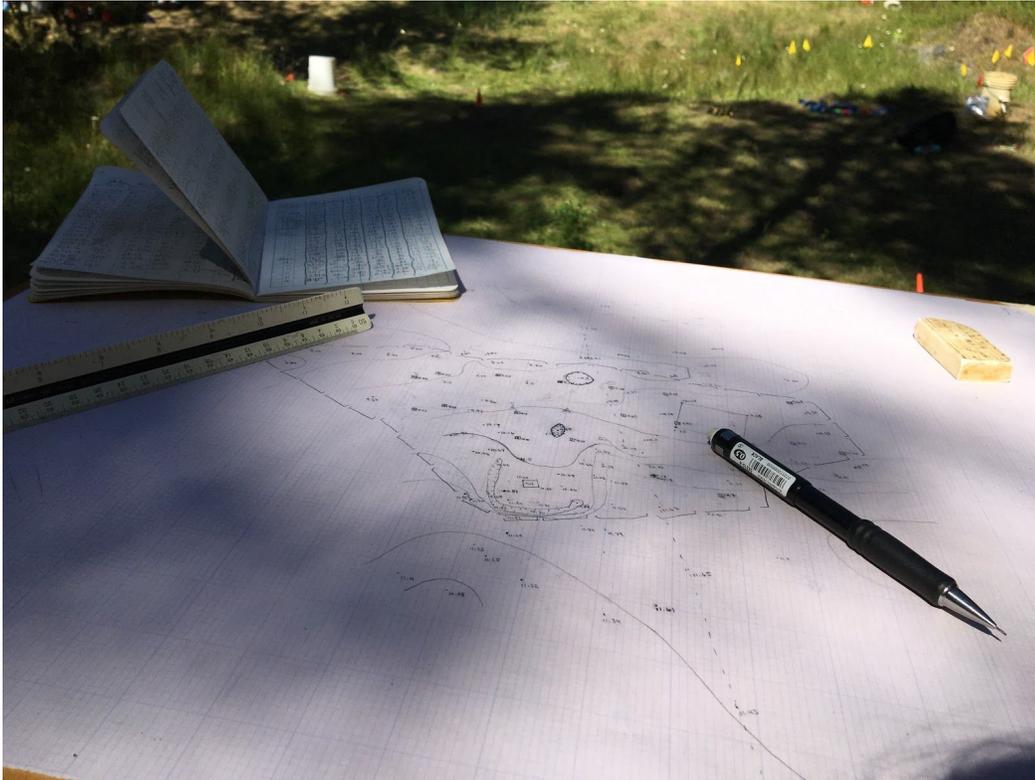
Getting ready to start mapping!



Myself working on the map



Plotting points on the map



Finished map!

After we finished the map, the other students were done with their tasks too. Some went on to conducting test units, and some went to help screen. What was exciting was that we opened up a unit in what is thought to have been a blacksmith shop. At this point, a handful of students stayed to work on this unit, including me, and the rest of our crew traveled to a nearby site for survey and testing. At this point, this is the first Chinese Blacksmith shop excavated in Oregon, and I was able to participate firsthand! We had no idea what to expect for this unit, and this made me puzzled. I had no knowledge of blacksmithing, and this further puzzled me. During down time in my tent, I took time to try to research Chinese blacksmiths, but I found very little. Luckily, our crew was able to access a report on an excavated chinese blacksmith, and we gained

a better understanding of what we were looking at. To not disclose too much information on this sensitive site, we were able to confirm this area was used for blacksmithing because of the amount of slag that was found. What I can say is that we brought the unit down to 70 centimeters below datum at 10 centimeter levels. We collected various soil samples throughout the unit to help us understand the different coloration we saw. We sketched out two walls, and tossed in a recent coin. At this point, this really was the end of our field school.

I look back at how wonderful this opportunity was, an entire month of seeing and experiencing new things. It was rewarding to finally put to use everything I have been learning. I think I got the full experience of what it is like to be an archaeologist, from long hot work days, to hard work, to exciting finds, and to camping for 27 days. I was given my very own trowel to keep forever, and I wrote in the Rite in the Rain yellow notebook. I felt that I really could be an archaeologist, despite all my doubts. Toward the end of the field school I shed some tears, not only because I was going to miss my crew, but they believed in me. Never in my life have I been treated better than how I was treated at field school. They changed my life, and the archaeological work tied my education together. Beyond this, field school further pushed me out of my comfort zone because I have never ventured outside of my hometown by myself, nor have I explored southern and eastern Oregon. I cannot express how much I gained from this field school, and I would have never been able to do it without the Jane Waldbaum Scholarship. I pulled from every resource I had, even with my scholarship, to attend the Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project. I also want to thank my family and friends who did everything they could to make this happen for me.

