



# Concho Valley Archeological Society Newsletter

January 2015

## CVAS Christmas Dinner



## Flint knapping with Concho oyster shells

By Tom Ashmore

You say what? That's what I thought too when I first heard about this, but the more I thought about it the more I believe it.

I first heard about this when we were getting my truck windshield replaced here in town. My wife saw that the owners had some points on display and asked about them. It turns out the owner is a knapper and owns property along the North Concho. We got to talking and he showed me some of his work and some points he had found on his property. When we were getting ready to leave he said he had one more thing he had to show me and he brought out the oyster shell you see in the photo here. He told me that he kept finding whole oyster shells far away from the river and in areas that appeared to be knapping areas from the debitage scattered around. It occurred to him they might not just be left over from cooking, which got him to try using them in his knapping. It worked and he's been using the technique ever since.



Concho oyster shell fits perfectly into very narrow barb cut in a piece of point found along Dove Creek.

I think he's probably correct. I've often wondered how they got such fine indentation cuts in some of the more delicate points, such as the one in the picture.

## Book Report Crossing The Plains, Days of '57

There are many historic books online for free. You can find them through the Kindle reader and Amazon, like I do, or through any number of free book services on line. The ones I particularly like are the first-hand accounts of the pioneer period.

Crossing of the Plains, Days of '57 is a Gutenberg eBook. It was written by William Audley Maxwell in 1915 and recounts his crossing of the West in 1857. His particular crossing was accomplished by ox-teams, pulling covered wagons. It begins as they leave the west bank of the Missouri River, with the objective of Sonoma County, California.

The company consisted of eleven men, ten women and sixteen minors. They were outfitted with eight wagons, about thirty yoke of oxen, fifty head of extra steers and cows, and ten or twelve saddle "ponies and mules."

Mr. Maxwell writes in an easy-to-read, straight forward fashion. The book flows at a simple pace and the things he remembers are in surprising detail, given the time passed between the event and his writings. Anyone wanting to learn first-hand what it was like will thoroughly enjoy this book. Just Google the name and it will come right up on your search.

## 2015 Dues

**Please don't forget that annual dues are due this month. The new application form is on the back of this newsletter or you can pay at the Christmas Dinner to our treasurer, Peter Norris, or our incoming treasurer, Steven Schooler.**

# Israeli cave offers clues about when humans mastered fire

sciencemag.org, By Nala Rogers, 12 December 2014

Mastering fire was one of the most important developments in human prehistory. But it's also one of the hardest to pin down, with different lines of evidence pointing to different timelines. A new study of artifacts from a cave in Israel suggests that our ancestors began regularly using fire about 350,000 years ago—far enough back to have shaped our culture and behavior but too recent to explain our big brains or our expansion into cold climates.

If most archaeological sites offer a snapshot of the ancient past, Tabun Cave provides a time-lapse video. The site, about 24 kilometers south of Haifa, documents 500,000 years of human history. “Tabun Cave is unique in that it's a site with a very long sequence,” says Ron Shimelmitz, an archaeologist at the University of Haifa and a co-author on the new study. “We could examine step by step how the use of fire changed in the cave.”

The researchers examined artifacts previously excavated from the site, which are mostly flint tools for cutting and scraping, and flint debris created in their manufacture. To determine when fire became a routine part of the lives of the cave dwellers, the team looked at flints from about 100 layers of sediments in the lowermost 16 meters of the cave deposits.

In layers older than roughly 350,000 years, almost none of the flints are burned. But in every layer after that, many flints show signs of exposure to fire: red or black coloration, cracking, and small round depressions where fragments known as pot lids flaked off from the stone. Wildfires are rare in caves, so the fires that burned the Tabun flints were probably controlled by ancestral humans, according to the authors. The scientists argue that the jump in the frequency of burnt flints represents the time when ancestral humans learned to control fire, either by kindling it or by keeping it burning between natural wildfires.

The findings are consistent with data from several nearby sites. On their own, these other sites provide little information about when humans mastered fire, because they represent shorter slices of time and most are not well dated. But in combination with the long, detailed record from Tabun, they suggest that ancestral humans all over the eastern Mediterranean learned to control fire around the same time, Shimelmitz says. Earlier ancestral humans may have used fire occasionally when they could find it, but because their artifacts show few signs of burning, they probably didn't use it daily, the researchers report in this month's issue of the *Journal of Human Evolution*.

This time frame is consistent with that of European sites. A 2011 review dated routine fire use in Europe to between 400,000 and 300,000 years ago. Together with the new study from Tabun, the data suggest that ancient humans did not master fire until hundreds of thousands of years after they expanded into cold climates. There are earlier sites with evidence of fire, but these are rare and often hard to interpret, according to Paola Villa of the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History in Boulder, a co-author of the 2011 review.

The new study won't end the debate, however. A few researchers have argued that ancestral humans did not regularly control fire until more recently, and others, such as Richard Wrangham of Harvard University, think that our ancestors mastered fire much earlier. Wrangham has argued that our ancestors started cooking food about 2 million years ago, when humans evolved smaller teeth and guts. He credits fire for favoring the evolution of many human traits, including our large brains.

All of those changes began long before the rise of burnt flints in Tabun Cave. Although he calls the finds “exciting,” Wrangham is not convinced by the sequence at this single site. The earliest inhabitants may have used the cave in different ways, such as to gather materials or butcher animals, saving their cooking for open-air sites, he says. “We clearly need more information.”

But he and Shimelmitz agree that whenever it arrived, fire gave ancestral humans tremendous advantages, including cooking, warmth, light in the night, and safety from predators. “There's a reason people think we got fire from the gods,” Shimelmitz adds.



## Mummified Man, Bundled Baby Change View of Ancient Burials in Texas

westerndigs.org, by Blake de Pastino on May 21, 2013

More than 10 elaborately prepared bodies recovered from caves in West Texas could rewrite the history of how people processed, buried, and even thought about the dead in the ancient Southwest, according to a new study.

Some of the remains, dating back as much as 4,000 years, were naturally mummified by the arid climate, leaving traces of skin, hair and internal tissues intact. Others were ritually “bundled,” a practice that involved flexing the deceased into a fetal position, wrapping it in a series of woven mats, and sometimes binding it with ropes made from human hair.

One set of remains, unearthed from a cave known as Mummy Shelter, was of an exceptionally well mummified adult male, and is at least 800 years older than was previously thought, dating back some 1,900 years.

Another set, of a one-year-old child, is the most ornate infant burial found in the region and has been dated at 3,800 years old — the oldest example of bundling ever studied, according to the research, published recently in the journal *Plains Anthropologist*.

The baby was interred in a rockshelter with a host of elaborate grave goods, including four ornaments carved out of mussel shells, pipes made from hollow reeds, and finely woven baskets that contained two tiny skull caps, braided out of natural fiber and affectionately painted in red diamond and zig-zag patterns.

Other bodies, removed from caves near where the Pecos River meets the Texas-Mexico border, have been found with baskets full of spare clothing and even food, suggesting that the dead were being outfitted for the afterlife.

Though not widely known today, except to archaeologists and relic hunters, these practices appear to have been common for a millennium or more among a nexus of cultures known simply as the Lower Pecos.

But Dr. Solveig Turpin, an anthropologist at the University of Texas at Austin who conducted the research, says her study — particularly of the festooned infant — pushes back the use of these customs by at least a thousand years.

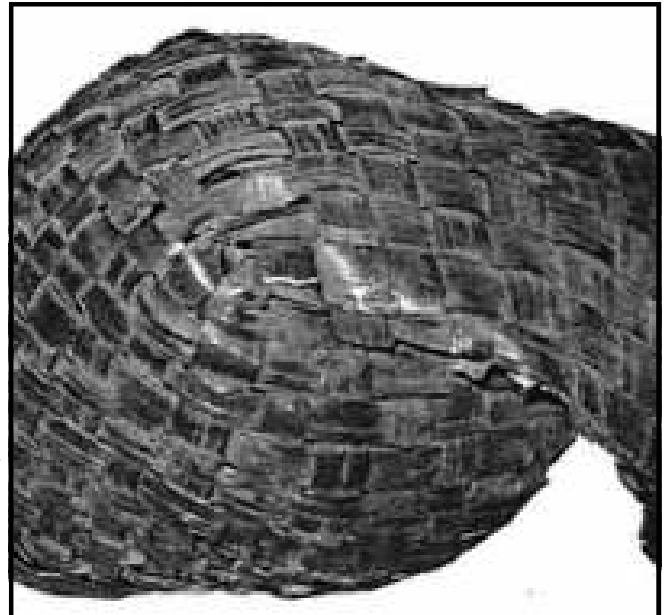
She conducted radiocarbon dating on 11 bundled burials from the Lower Pecos region, taking samples from the fiber wrappings. Of those samples, 9 turned out to be 1,300 to 2,300 years old, dating to the end of a period known as the Late Archaic, when experts generally agree that such fastidious funerary practices were more common.

But tests of the infant bundle dated it to 3,800 years ago, more than a millennium earlier than expected. The results were so unusual that Turpin conducted the tests twice.

“I was surprised by the first [result] because it was older than the other baby [remains’] dates, so I ran a second sample,” she told Western Digs by email.

As for the mummified man from Mummy Cave, “I tend to accept the new date because it puts it in the same time period as the other adult bundles.”

Much of what we know about the Lower Pecos comes largely from burials like these, and the thousands of pictographs found on rocks throughout the region.



Woven skull cap found on woman buried in Lower Pecos rockshelter, dated to around 10 BCE (Plains Anthropologist/S. Turpin)

## Mummified Man, Bundled Baby Change View of Ancient Burials in Texas

(continued from previous page)

Rather than a single, coherent civilization, the region may have seen a continuum of cultures, beginning around 9,000 years ago and culminating in historic times with the absorption of its heritage into the tribes of south Texas and Northern Mexico.

The remains studied by Turpin had been excavated decades ago, over a period of 50 years. Some had been looted by relic hunters and kept in private collections and museums; others were professionally excavated in the 1930s.

By tracking down the far-flung remains, Turpin was able to create a comprehensive record of Lower Pecos life, and death. Taken together, the new dates illustrate a pattern in which these complex burial patterns waxed and waned over time.

Turpin theorizes that the customs may have fluctuated with the climate — during cooler, wetter periods when the grasslands extended into ancient South Texas, so too came the Plains hunters and their customs.

And when the region returned to the arid landscape like the one we know today, living — and bundling the dead — in dry rock shelters also regained favor, a lifeway of a desert culture.

There's still much left to learn about the Lower Pecos people, Turpin said: "There are other bundles that should and could be dated."

## More on Independence Creek's Alan's Shelter point identification

by Tom Ashmore

Eric Schroeder reports that he ran the idea of our Alan's Shelter point possibly being a Martindale by the resident expert, Elton Prewitt. Elton continues to believe it to be a Bandy due to its thinness.

There is much debate in the point identification community on these two points. In fact, the identification of the Martindale in lithicsnet.com is entitled:

### **MARTINDALE a.k.a. BANDY in Southern Texas**

Further, they go on to state, "The Martindale has a equivalent point type called the Bandy point which is found in the lower Pecos region of Texas. There seems to be very little difference between the two point types with the exception that the Bandy is in general thinner than the Martindale. "

So, I bow to the experts. We will identify this as a Lower Pecos Bandy point in our future reporting.



Alan's Shelter point

WE'RE ON THE WEB AT  
CVASSANANGELO.ORG

### Meeting Location

Please remember that our meetings are now in the classroom at the Fort Concho Living History Stables, **236 Henry O. Flipper St.** We enter through the side door.

## 2014 Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Family members \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

I pledge I will not intentionally violate the terms or conditions of any current or future state or local statute concerning cultural resources or engage in the practice of buying or selling artifacts for commercial purposes, or engage in the willful destruction of archeological data, or disregard proper archeological field techniques

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: CVAS, 4063 Green Meadow Dr., San Angelo, TX 76904

<b>Individual</b>	<b>\$15</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Family</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Student or military N/C</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>

(active military only)