



# *Concho Valley Archeological Society Newsletter*

*September 2010*

## **TAS Field School reveals centuries of history in Medina County, TX** by Christine Buckstead

The Texas Archeological Society held its annual field school in Medina County, Texas June 12-19, 2010. The city of Hondo, TX hosted participants who excavated a prehistoric site north of Hondo, a pre-Civil War dump pit in Castroville, TX and performed a pedestrian survey near Bandera Falls in Bandera County. Dr. Thomas R. Hester was the Principal Investigator of the field school.

Several members and friends of the Concho Valley Archeological Society participated in the field school. Christine Buckstead, her father Bob Riggins, Brownie Roberts, Marcia Asel (Brownie's sister), Arnetta Cooper, Tim Brewster, and Royce Baker all excavated at the prehistoric site known as Eagle Bluff on the Calvert Ranch. Artifacts and features indicate that the site was a Toyah phase village or camp site. We found a variety of stone tools including Perdiz points, scrapers, drills, and utilized flakes. We also found fire cracked rock (FCR) indicative of earth ovens, and processed animal bones, including bison and small mammals. Ceramic fragments were also recovered. The distribution of artifacts and features will be analyzed to hopefully reveal the spatial organization of Toyah villages.

The dig at Castroville provided compelling confirmation of a Civil War incident known from historical records. A military unit of musicians and cavalry were ordered back to the Texas coast when Texas seceded from the Union. Sympathizers informed them that a group of over 2000 Confederate soldiers were intent on capturing them. To hide from their enemies, the soldiers dumped all their gear in a pit in Castroville. The dump site was located when the owner of the Old Alsatian Steakhouse recognized Civil War-era artifacts recovered from a hole being dug for a new barbecue pit. The artifacts include buckles, guns, liquor bottles and bridles, and are of the age and type expected from a group of soldiers from just before the Civil War. **(continued on page 2)**

### **September CVAS Meeting Presentation 23 September, 7 p.m.**

The speaker for Sept will be Jimmy Smith of the Tarrant County Archeological Society. He is an Archeological Steward with THC and a past president of TAS. His topic is the Techado Spring site in New Mexico. This is the site owned by TAS member Pinkie Robertson that has two prehistoric pueblo ruins. TAS members have worked at the site for several years and have written a comprehensive report.

Techado Spring Pueblo, inhabited during the last half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is a 700 room pueblo located in West-Central New Mexico. It is in an area where little work has been done and is important because it lies in a region that borders the Anasazi to the north and Mogollon to the south. The large number of excavated rooms provide unparalleled evidence of social interaction and warfare in that region.

## TAS Field School reveals centuries of history in Medina County, TX

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Each day began with a 5:00 AM wake-up call and camp breakfast. Excavation, pedestrian survey and lab work took place from 7 AM - 1 PM daily. Each afternoon, participants could relax in the refreshing Hondo creek, or attend teacher workshops or lectures, including a session on “An Introduction to Celestial Navigation,” presented by Claude Hudspeth. Evening activities included lectures on Texas prehistory, the annual “Sinking of the Titanic” presented by the camp children, a sing-along, and artifact identification event. More detailed information and photos can be found on the TAS website: [www.txarch.org](http://www.txarch.org).



## Sterling City outing scheduled for Sep 25th

We have set up another trip to Tower Hill on Saturday, 25 September. We will depart from the Sterling City Town and Country store at 8:30 a.m. Tom will guide the way out the ranch, which is 5 miles from Sterling City. The owner, Mr. Macentire, cannot be there this time, but gave Tom the gate code. We will drive to the bottom of the hill and hike up. Bring heavy boots and preferable a garden hoe, water, snacks, etc. It is a fairly easy hike to the top. We did not find any rattlesnakes up there last time, but the owner told us the time before he encountered eight at various locations going up and back down the hill. It must depend on the season, so we need to beware.

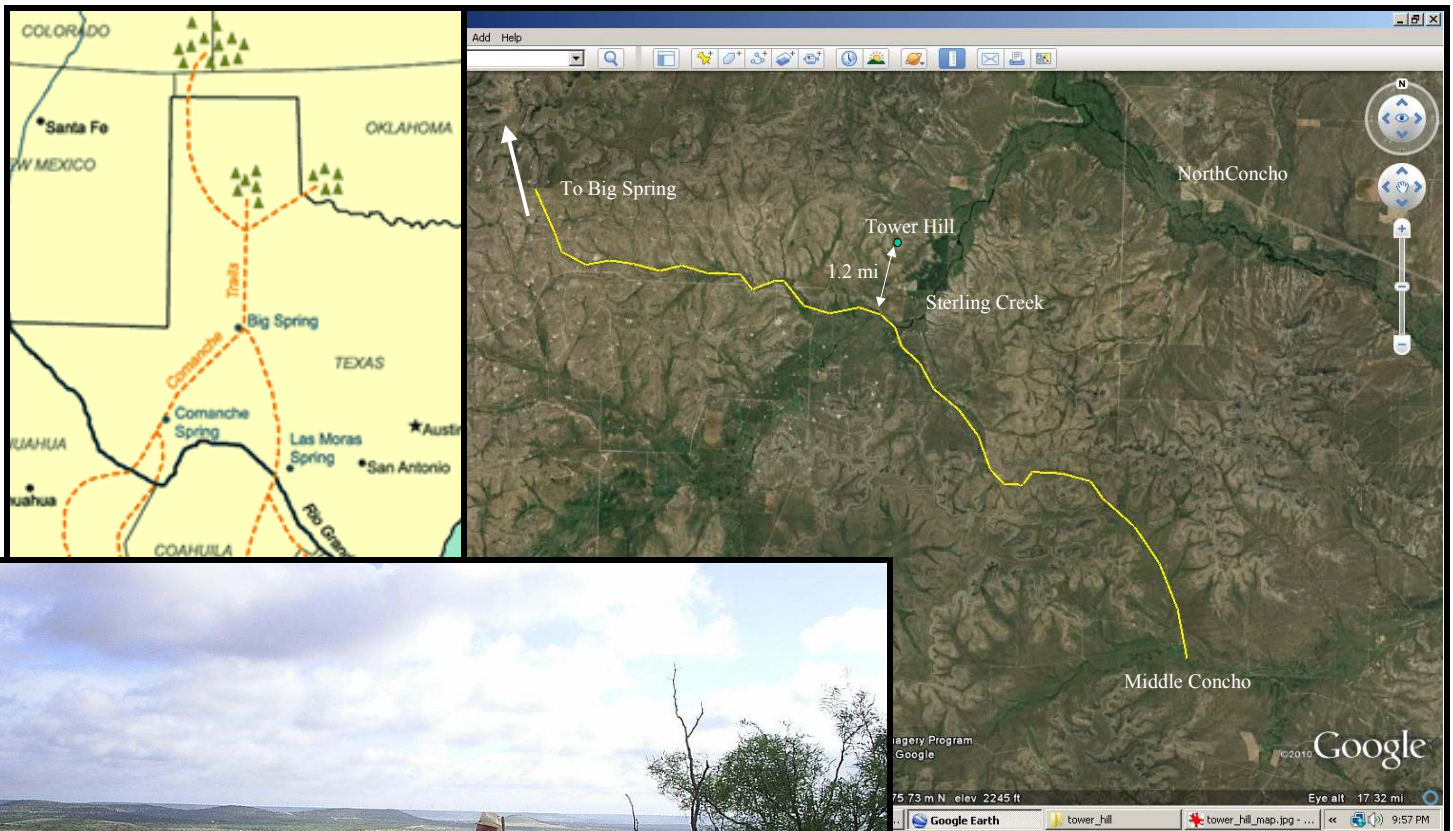
One of our group (Ray Theiss) will be doing metal detecting around the bottom of the hill this time if anyone wants to join him. We covered the top of the hill pretty well last time and found no metal whatsoever (it's been thoroughly picked over by treasure hunters over the last 90 years). Most of the initial survey work was done on the last visit and this site is already documented with THC, so this is mostly for folks who could not make that trip and would like to see the site for themselves. It is a spectacular view from the top and is worth it for that alone.



## Tower Hill's Purpose

By Tom Ashmore

It is pretty obvious that Tower Hill was used as a spotter outpost. We still have not been able to view the artifacts found, but based on articles written discussing finding both old muskets as well as cartridges indicate it may have been used both before and after the Civil War period, but by exactly who and when is still a mystery. The one thing I think a viewing of the topography can show us is why this particular hill might have been chosen. It appears to be overlooking the likely path of the Comanche Trail. Sterling Creek would have been a stopping point for the Indians and it is well known they made their trails from one water source to another. The map on the left, taken from Texas Beyond History website, indicates this might have been the eastern portion of the Comanche Trail and Tower Hill would be perfect location to watch for passing war parties while remaining undetected. The extensive walls of stone also indicate it was probably a military outpost and, as previously reported, the size of the probable corral indicates there were probably no more than six horses kept on top of the hill. Six soldiers would not have taken on a Comanche war party. So now the question is who would they have reported to once they did detect a passing Indian war party. A likely candidate is the post known as Camp Elizabeth, which is located approximately 9 miles away and was occupied by Texas Rangers before the Civil War (circa 1853) and Buffalo Soldiers from Fort Concho after the Civil War (1874 -1886). However, without artifacts to help support the theory, it remains that—only a theory.



Commanding view from Tower Hill

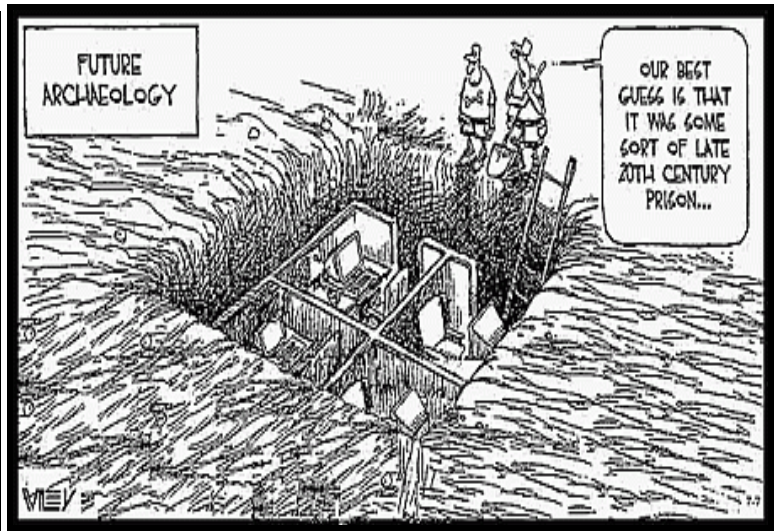


## CVAS at Grape Creek Butterfield Fly-In

Tom Ashmore displayed the artifacts from the Johnson's Station project and presented a full graphic display of the entire Butterfield Trail from Fort Chadbourne to Horsehead Crossing at the Grape Creek Butterfield Fly-In on Saturday, 18 September. Many of the local residents, some having lived in the area their entire lives, commented enthusiastically on how much new information we were providing them. Tom also provided sheets for the pilots of important flyover points between Grape Creek and Fort Chadbourne, as well as Grape Creek to Horsehead Crossing. During the day we had one new member sign up their family. In the morning one interested viewer, Mr. H.B. Edmondson, pointed to the Google Earth view of the North Concho crossing and stated, "That's my property!" He was very excited to know that the Butterfield Trail crossed his property and invited CVAS to come visit the crossing. He also said he believes he can get us in touch with the property owner in Water Valley that we've been trying to contact to determine the possible lost location of Camp Johnston. He owns property right across the river from the owner and believes he can help us. Tom will be contacting Mr. Edmondson to set up visits in the near future.



Display of Johnson's Station cartridges, nails, and harmonica reeds. Also on display were cooking items, canteens, cavalry items, tools, horseshoes, and ranch items.



# Archeologists unearth Bernardo Plantation

By Joe Southern, Katy Sun, 23 Aug 10

HEMPSTEAD — Archeologists have discovered and are excavating the site of Bernardo Plantation, the place where Gen. Sam Houston took possession of the Twin Sisters cannons and marshaled his troops for the battle of San Jacinto. Located just a few miles south of Hempstead on property owned by Houston television owner Greg Brown, teams of professional and volunteer archeologists have unearthed two of the four fireplaces of the 1822 plantation home and are recovering a treasure trove of artifacts.

“This is one of the lost plantation sites of Texas that we’ve found,” said Jim Bruseth, director of the archeology division for the Texas Historical Commission. Bernardo Plantation was built in 1822 by Jared Ellison Groce II and is believed to be the largest plantation in the Republic of Texas and the western-most cotton plantation in the South. The plantation is built near a rock crossing in the Brazos River and served as a crossroads for travel in the old republic. The steamboat Yellow Stone used to tie up at the ferry landing at the site.

“The Twin Sister cannons were delivered to Sam Houston here from Cincinnati, Ohio,” Bruseth said.

The site is being excavated in cooperation with the Texas Historical Commission, the Community Archaeology Research Institute of Houston and the Houston Archeological Society. In addition to the brick and sandstone fireplaces, the workers have found nails, glass and ceramic shards, pieces of bone, coins, bullets, buttons, parts of lanterns, hoes, horse tack, parts of a cast iron fence and more.

Gregg Dimmick, a pediatrician from Wharton, with the assistance of avocational archeologist Jim Woodrick, discovered the site last spring. In August, teams using a magnetometer and then ground-penetrating radar verified the exact location of the main house. On Wednesday, Dec. 9, teams arrived to begin the dig.

Displayed on a table with some of the newly-uncovered artifacts at the site were some items found just across the river in 1915 from the spot where Houston’s troops camped. Bruseth said this is a major find for Texas history.

“If you’ve read any of the early documents about the fight for Texas independence, this plantation site figured prominently in that,” he said. “Anybody of any importance came through here.”

The house had four rooms, each 20 feet by 20 feet. Each room had its own fireplace. There was a 12-foot wide dogtrot down the center of the building.

“The house was dismantled in 1865,” Bruseth said.

He said there is evidence the house was built in stages, with the first two fireplaces being made of sandstone quarried by slaves from the river. The second two fireplaces were made of red brick, also constructed by slave labor. According to a press release issued by the Texas Historical Commission, Bernardo provided the facilities, services and a strategic location for Sam Houston and his Texian soldiers to prepare for the Mexican army 10 days before the Battle of San Jacinto.

The Twin Sisters cannons arrived from Ohio sympathizers and nearby, the steamboat Yellow Stone waited to ferry soldiers across the Brazos River. Large groups of people fleeing the approaching Gen. Santa Anna and his troops passed through as part of what became known as the Runaway Scrape.

The collection of structures including the main house, stand-alone kitchen, slaves’ quarters, traveler’s hostel and cabin for the resident doctor was where more than 100 people once lived and worked along the banks of the Brazos River. Bernardo, believed to be named after the Mexican governor of Texas at the time, is considered the South’s last major cotton plantation as well as the nation’s farthest westward cotton plantation.

“With regards to Texas early history, its location in the Brazos Valley is where the South became the West,” says Texas State Historian Light Cummins. “Bernardo was where plantation history began in our state with the planting of the first cotton crop in the Austin colony, and in terms of slave numbers remained the largest plantation in the Republic of Texas.”

Previous investigations in the summer and early fall yielded portions of hand-held tools, wagon and harness pieces, fragments of ceramic vessels and other household items.

“As we began to recover artifacts we were presented with some of the most poignant experiences an archeologist can have,” said Robert Marcom, a principal investigator with the Houston-based nonprofit Community Archaeology Research Institute, Inc. (CARI). “For instance, finding a heavy hoe blade that’s more than 170 years old is a reminder of both the economic possibilities that the early settlers hoped to exploit as well as the terrible human cost that enslavement exacted on those who were forced to labor under the hot Texas sun.”

CARI will continue to manage the Bernardo Plantation Archeology Project with the assistance of the THC and volunteers from the Texas, Houston, Fort Bend and Brazosport archeological societies. Long term plans include partial excavation of the site, leaving some areas for future experts to explore with techniques not yet available. The goal is to eventually use the site as a learning tool for archeology classes and field schools. Researchers also hope to learn more about descendants of the slaves who once worked the plantation, many of whom are believed to live in and around the Hempstead area.

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.

### 2010 CVAS 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: Cynthia Purcell, PO Box 703, San Angelo, TX 76902

<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)