

2017 TAS Lower Pecos Canyonlands Academy

-Ken Lawrence

On January 13th to 15th, over 60 TAS members participated in the 2017 Lower Pecos Canyonlands (LPC) Academy in Langtry, Texas. The academy was done in partnership with Texas State University's Ancient Southwest Texas Project (ASWT), which has been conducting multi-year archaeological investigations in Eagle Nest Canyon. This multi-disciplinary academy was taught by a large assembly of instructors including Dr. Steve Black and Dr. Charles Frederick (Principal Investigators), Charles Koenig (Field Director-Project Archaeologist), Amanda Castañeda (Horse Trail), Daniel Rodriguez (Kelley Cave), Matt Basham (upland sites), Christina Nielsen (Eagle Cave), Victoria C. Pagano (Sayles Adobe), Dr. Leslie Bush and Dr. J. Kevin Hanselka (archaeobotany), Dr. Chris Jurgens (zooarchaeology), Vicky and Jerod Roberts (rock art), Dr. David Kilby (Bonfire Shelter), and Arlo McKee and Ken Lawrence (alluvial history). Assisting Academy Committee members Karen Fustes, Rachal Roessler, Debra Eller, David Yelacic, and Jimmy Barrera managed the administrative duties for the academy while SHUMLA and ASWT collaborators provided assistance and guided tours in the area.

Over the long weekend, the academy provided a perfect mix of classroom instruction at the SHUMLA campus followed by field trips that highlighted the canyon and its archaeological sites, field methods, and relevant research results. Topics included landscape change, economic botany, rock art, rockshelter formation processes, geomorphic history in the region, and human use of the canyon spanning the late Pleistocene and Holocene.

The activities of the academy started on Friday afternoon with a special tour of the White Shaman rock art site with SHUMLA staff Jerod and Vicky Roberts assisting Dr. Carolyn Boyd who discussed the famous mural, a topic of her recent book (Figure 1). The day concluded Friday evening at the SHUMLA campus with a lecture presented by Dr. Steve Black and Charles Koenig who discussed the history and archaeological investigations in the region. Both of these informal Friday activities were enjoyed by all and set the stage for an exceptional academy weekend.

Saturday morning, following the lectures the field trip began in the uplands along the canyon edge (Figure 2). The various academy instructors guided the group (gingerly through the dog pear cactus) pointing out the landscape, geology, flora, and diverse upland archaeological sites. The group stopped for a nice lunch at the Judge Roy Bean Visitor Center in Langtry, before hiking into the canyon. Once there, the group visited the Kelley Cave, Skiles Shelter, and Horse Trail rock shelters as well as Sayles Adobe, a stratified alluvial terrace site (Figures 3-5). At each site, the instructors discussed the results of their investigations and how the site compares to other sites in the canyon. Further, the SHUMLA staff instructors provided a discussion of the rock art panels in the shelters. The day concluded with the attendees returning to the SHUMLA campus and viewing artifacts recovered from the various excavations at the sites visited during the day.

After the classroom lecture, Sunday provided a full day of field trip activities including visits to Eagle Cave, Bonfire Shelter, and a riverwalk to discuss alluvial history in the canyon (Figures 6 and 9). The attendees enjoyed a nice lunch in the canyon below Eagle Cave (Figure 7). The day and academy concluded with the attendees returning to the SHUMLA campus and viewing artifacts recovered from Eagle Cave.

Overall, the academy was considered a great success by participants who varied in experience and geographic origin. The LPC Academy greatly benefited by partnering with SHUMLA particularly wants to recognize and thank the landowners the Skiles family (Figure 8). Also, gratitude is extended to Jack Johnson of the Amistad National Recreation Area (US National Park Service). The academy could not have been done without the help of these individuals and organizations.



Figure 1. SHUMLA staffer Jerod Roberts guiding academy group at White Shaman field trip.



Figure 2. Dr. Charles Frederick lecturing about Lower Pecos geology and landscape.



Figure 3. Attendees visiting Kelley Cave as Dan Rodriguez discusses investigations in the shelter.



Figure 4. Dr. Steve Black and Amanda Castañeda discuss the investigations at Horse Trail Shelter.



Figure 5. Instructors Dr. Chris Jurgens (zooarchaeology) and Tori Pagano (Sayles Adobe) with academy attendee Sean Farrell.



Figure 6. Instructor Charles Koenig discusses Eagle Cave investigations.



Figure 7. The LPC Academy below Eagle Cave.



Figure 8. Skiles Family – November 20, 2016 at ENC overlook with Eagle Cave in background. From left: Russel, Raymond, Wilmuth, Jack, and Peggy Skiles.



Figure 9. Instructor Ken Lawrence discussing flood events along the Rio Grande.