

KNOW YOUR PRESIDENT

(in this case Scott, not Bill)

In good journalist style, your editor posed a series of questions to the Society President, Scott Akridge, as he starts his second year in office. It seems appropriate that you should know the Society officers, how they got interested in archeology, how they view the role of the Society in Arkansas archeology, and what plans they have for the Society. Hester Davis (HD) is interviewing Scott Akridge (SA).

HD: When and how did you get interested in archeology?

SA: In a sense I have been interested since I was a little kid. My uncle, John Williams, spent much of his spare time surface hunting for artifacts. When we visited his home, I was always fascinated with the things he had collected all within 50 miles or so of our home in White County. On one of my birthdays, twelfth I think, John gave me a handful of points he had collected as a gift. A short time later he took me to some of the sites where he collected, and I became hooked on surface hunting. I did not get to do much until I turned sixteen and began to drive to sites. My friend Barry Taylor and I collected from numerous sites in southeast White County for the next four years. In the summer of 1984, I visited Toltec Mounds Archeological State Park and was fascinated with what I saw. I picked up an application for the Society there and later filled it out and sent it in. I have been participating in Society activities ever since.

HD: What experience have you had in the field and the lab?

SA: My activities are too numerous to mention them all. My first excavation experience was at Holman Springs (3SV29) in 1985. Other major projects include the Cleo Watkins site salvage (3GE346) in 1987, Grigsby site test (3RA262) in 1988, steamboat excavations (3CT243) in 1988, Toltec (3LN42) in 1989 and 1990, and Taylor Mounds (3DR2) in 1991 and 1992. I have participated in numerous other weekend projects for various archeologists.

When I went to ASU in the fall of 1985, I visited Dr. Dan Morse in his office and volunteered to work in the lab a few hours a week. I became hooked on the work and often spent 15 hours a week or more in the lab. A semester after I started, Danny Moore began volunteering in the lab, and we became good friends. Since then, we have served as best man at each other's wedding. From the fall of 1987 through the summer of 1988, I served as Morse's graduate assistant and continued to accumulate many hours in the lab and a few on excavations. I learned a lot about archeology from Dan and Phyllis (Morse) and owe them a debt of gratitude for "acculturating" me to the world of archeology.

I do not have a personal collection of artifacts, which surprises many people I meet. I donate all the artifacts I collect to the respective research stations. I do have a type collection bag in which I keep mostly non-provenienced artifacts that I use for educational purposes.



Scott Akridge at the Taylor Mounds site, June 1992.
(AAS Neg. No. 924434)

I have kept a fairly good accounting of my activities and to date total 1190 lab hours, 495 hours of surface survey, and 450 hours of excavation. These numbers are for "official" projects of the Survey, Society, and some work for contract firms I have done. These numbers do not include the countless hours of visiting sites and landowners, filling out forms (I have recorded some 150 sites thus far), writing letters, washing artifacts, etc., on my own time. Talks to school and civic groups, radio and TV interviews, and Society meetings are also not counted in these figures.

HD: What is the most fun and what is the most interesting archeological experience you've had?

SA: This is a tough one. Every project has its unique moments, but there are a few which stick out in my mind. The most fun has to be the first project I participated in – Holman Springs in 1985. My pit supervisor was Skip Stewart-Abernathy. It didn't matter what I had found – potsherd, rock, mussel shell, change in soil color, etc. – Skip would always respond, "OOHHH, WWWOOOWWW!!!" as though each item I found was the greatest archeological discovery of modern times. I had a lot of fun, and the enthusiasm of Skip and others was a springboard for my participation in future activities of the Survey and Society.

The most interesting archeological experience occurred when I worked for Garrow and Associates on the L'Anguille River Project in the summer of 1987. Our job was to survey the right of way for the L'Anguille River channelization project. Our project archeologist, David Anderson, had obtained permission from a landowner who owned property near the mouth of the river to put a test unit in each site we discovered during surface survey. A problem arose because no one had told the farmer (who was not the landowner) that we would be working in his fields.

David divided the crew into four groups of two persons each to test various locations along a mile-long stretch of the natural levee of the river. All of the tests were in the fields being farmed by this one farmer. When the farmer discovered us, he and two of his employees came charging up to the first excavation area in their pickup. They pulled a shotgun and threatened the two crew members there, who quickly replied that they were following orders of the project director, David, and the company owner, Patrick Garrow, who were at the next site down the river. The farmer ordered the two crew members off the land, and then he and his men jumped back into the truck and headed to the site where David and Patrick were. The farmers refused to listen to anyone and ordered the crew at gunpoint to get in their vehicle and leave immediately. I was at the last site down the river and did not know any of this had occurred until one of our crew members came screaming down the road in the Bronco and told us to drop everything and get in the car. As we got into the Bronco, the farmer and his group came up in their pickup with the shotgun pointing out the window right at us. I was in the back seat and all the way out was staring at the shotgun pointing at me from behind.

We got into the town of Marianna and pulled over behind David and Patrick across the street from a convenience store where the farmers stopped. Our primary concern was the two crew members who the farmers had first met. They were nowhere to be found when we passed by their site on the way out. David and Patrick decided to talk to the farmers at the store. When they explained who we were and why we were there, the farmers realized their mistake and agreed to allow us to continue working. We returned to the first site and found our two crew members

in the woods along the river. They said that after the farmers threatened them, they headed into the woods by the river and were prepared to swim if they heard gunshots from our location downriver. David and Patrick decided we had had enough that day, so we gathered our equipment and took the rest of the day off. On later days the farmers visited us and were very friendly. We finished our work there in a few days with no further problems. There is no question in my mind that this is the most interesting archeological experience I have ever had.

HD: Tell us a little about yourself – where you were you born and raised; your education; where you live now and your job; your wife's work and/or interest/patience with archeology!

SA: I was born in Little Rock. At the age of six weeks my family moved to Kensett where I grew up and my parents still live. I am twenty-seven years old.

I currently live in Bradford and teach at Riverview Senior High School in Judsonia where I have been employed for four years as social studies teacher.

Bliss, my wife, currently teaches keyboarding at Newport Junior High School. She has little interest in archeology but is glad to get me out of the house once in a while. She enjoys attending the annual meeting and traveling around the state with me. She also straightens out our personal computer (and me) when it doesn't want to do what I want it to do.

HD: What do you feel are some of the "big issues" in Arkansas archeology?

SA: To me there is only one issue to which all others are secondary – EDUCATION! I think the Survey has done a fantastic job over the last 25 years recording and interpreting information about Arkansas' past, even though many of the station archeologists feel they do not get to devote enough time to research. What has been lacking is a program for disseminating this information to the public. Every archeologist in North America knows at least something about Arkansas archeology, and every grave robber knows about the artifacts that can be found in this state. But the rest of the people in Arkansas have a very vague understanding about the cultural heritage of our state. The recent publication of the two new books in the Survey's Popular Series is a major step in the right direction. Educating the public is the primary method by which the Survey can garner public support for increased funding from the legislature as well as from major grant sources. I am not advocating increasing the public education workload of the station archeologists, but I do believe that a public education program which would concentrate on producing and using all forms of media to reach the public would be highly productive.

Another issue I consider very important is the rapid destruction of archeological sites in Arkansas, particularly in the eastern half of the state. Hopefully, the legislature's

recent enactment of the law which protects unmarked graves will help curtail the destruction of sites by looters, but a great many sites are being destroyed by farmers who landlevel their farms to increase crop production. I think many landowners would safeguard the sites on their property if they knew the significance and uniqueness of each site.

HD: What do you think the Society can and/or should do about the above?

SA: As far as public education is concerned, Archeology Week appears to be a major success to me. It is a relatively new program, begun only in 1990, but the participation of so many individuals and groups focusing on archeology in Arkansas during a concentrated period of time really gets the word out statewide that Arkansas has an enormous amount of very important cultural resources and that there are a lot of people who dedicate their time to preserve these resources. Every week is archeology week to the station archeologists, but the designation of "Archeology Week" helps to inform the public about the work of the state's archeologists.

Concerning the destruction of sites, I think Society members should be far more involved with site preservation than they are. There are a very few Society members who record sites and revisit the sites on a regular basis. They make the necessary contacts with the landowners to let them know that the site on their property is worth

saving. The vast majority of Society members have never recorded a site much less communicated its importance to landowners. This is certainly an area the Society could work on improving, but it takes individual efforts—people doing the legwork in the field—to ensure these sites are recognized and preserved.

HD: Any other plans for the Society and its activities?

SA: We have Archeology Week 1993 coming up in April. Glen Akridge, my brother, is chair this year after Diana Moxley did such a wonderful job the past two years.

The Training Program/Society Dig this year is in the Ouachita National Forest in June. This year will be unique in that the Forest Service and the Survey/Society have agreed to a cost-share proposal to conduct the excavations and ensure that the analysis and write up are also done. If this program is successful, I think we should more actively pursue such agreements in the future.

The Society has also been considering experimenting with certain aspects of the Training Program. One proposal being looked at is to have some of the more advanced members of the Certification Program spend their entire time during the Society Dig involved with the analysis (sorting, weighing, counting, etc.) of the materials from past digs that have not yet been written up. Much of this type of work needs to be done and may never be completed unless the Society actively deals with it.

NEW EXHIBITS AT TOLTEC

Saturday, April 10, 1993 at 10:00 a.m.

Members of the Arkansas Archeological Society and friends are invited to the formal dedication of the new exhibits at Toltec Mounds Archeological State Park. Representatives of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism and the Arkansas Archeological Survey will open the completely redesigned exhibit hall.

The new exhibits are based on years of research and excavations at the Park. Volunteers provided thousands of hours toward the recovery and care of the artifacts and information. Many of the Society members were among these volunteers and will want to see the results as shown in these exhibits.

Funding for the exhibits was provided by the Natural and Cultural Resources Council, the Department of Parks, and the Arkansas Archeological Survey. New information on the Indians' use of plants and animals, stone tools, and mound construction, and the methods of archeology is presented.

This dedication is an Archeology Week activity. Dr. Martha A. Rolingson, station archeologist at Toltec Mounds Archeological State Park, is scheduled to give Archeology Week talks, *Exploring Indian Life at Toltec Mounds State Park*, at 11:00 a.m. and again at 2:00 p.m. The public is invited.



Field Notes

*newsletter
of the
arkansas archeological society*

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Robert Chowning, life member of the Society, and Martha Rolingson, Toltec State Park, look at some of the thousands of artifacts that Robert has donated to the Survey (see article on page 3-4). (AAS Neg. No. 932099)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

17 February 1993

Dear Hester:

I appreciated the interview with Scott Akridge, and especially his recounting the tale of the encounter we had with three local farmers during the L'Anguille River survey in 1987. Your readers may be interested in hearing more of the story, which makes that day also stand as MY most memorable experience in 20 plus years of professional archeological field work.

The run-in with the three farmers along the L'Anguille was exciting enough. As Scott said, we had the landowner's permission to be out there, so having three behemoths (who looked like they played defensive linemen for a pro football team) descend on us with shotguns and axe handles was, needless to say, a shock. As an aside, we had also talked with the father of these gentlemen, but weren't aware that he suffered from memory problems and had neglected to tell his sons!

I'll never forget telling the main farmer (whose shotgun was aimed right at my midsection), as calmly as I could, the name of the landowner, the local magistrate, and anyone else of authority I could think of as to why we were there. Meanwhile, Pat Garrow (owner of the firm who had the contract for this project and our boss who had come out for the day to visit the project) was off to one side whispering "I think it's time to go!" over and over. I knew the tension was beginning to ease when the leader put his shotgun down and said "Maybe I won't shoot you after all, just beat the *** out of you if you don't get out of here." We agreed to relocate to a neutral country store and talk things over and, fortunately, worked things out. All three farmers came out on subsequent days and watched and worked with us, and one of them even (as a joke) suggested a day or two later "What do you think your crew would do if I fired a few rounds in the air?" I suggested that it probably wouldn't be a good idea, as most of us were pretty traumatized by the event in the first place. As Tim Pauketat (one of the crew that day, and now a professional archeologist who has been helping unravel the mysteries of Cahokia) later said, I "was probably the most educated person that farmer had ever held a gun on."

If this was all that happened that July 23, 1987, it would still be a day to remember. What follows, however, ensured I would NEVER forget it. That night, as I drove Pat Garrow back to the Memphis airport where he was scheduled to fly out for Atlanta, we got caught in a terrific thunderstorm. We were driving down the road east of Forrest City in pouring rain, with lightening popping all around us, when suddenly the whole world went greenish-white. The next thing I knew all the power was off in the car (lights, dash, engine) and we were slowing to a halt in the middle of the Interstate. I coasted off the road and, after a minute, Pat and I realized that the car had been hit (or perhaps just missed) by a bolt of lightening! The charge fried the computer in the engine, and it wouldn't start despite our best efforts. We eventually hitched a ride to a phone and got one of the crew to come and rescue us. The car eventually had to be towed in by the rental company and when we went to get a replacement we found we were celebrities of a sort: no one had engine failure caused by lightening before! My life since that memorable day, fortunately, has been far less exciting. Nearly getting shot and being hit by lightening in one 12 hour period is enough to make me grateful that archeology is really not like Indiana Jones portrays it!

Scott Akridge was one of the finest archeological field technicians I have ever had the pleasure of working with, and singlehandedly found more than his share of good sites and artifacts during our survey. I know the Arkansas Archeological Society is in good hands under his leadership.

David G. Anderson
(Life Member of the Society)
Southeast Region
National Park Service, Atlanta



Field Notes

*newsletter
of the
arkansas archeological society*

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Shady Lake
recreation area,
Ouachita National
Forest,
site (sight?) of the
1993 Archeological
Training Program.

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