Sul Ross State University
Center for Big Bend Studies
2025 Field School

OVERVIEW

Pala Vieja Rockshelter (41PS209) is located in the Big Bend region of Texas. Initial reconnaissance at the site in 2016 by Dr. Bryon Schroeder of the Center for Big Bend Studies (CBBS) revealed intact sedimentary and archaeological deposits with perishable artifacts on the surface including cordage, squash, and maize. Evidence of past looting suggests part of the deposits have been compromised. The site therefore offers an excellent opportunity to mitigate a damaged archaeological site while also instructing students and researching the lives of past people living in the Northern Chihuahua Desert. Field work will take place in three 10-day sessions over late May through early July.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be exposed to the fundamentals of archaeological excavation and will be able to demonstrate each of the following by the end of the course:

- How to identify artifact materials and what constitutes an archaeological site in the field
- Sediment description—principals of stratigraphy, feature evaluation, description and recording
- A practical understating of excavations practices, horizontal and vertical mapping, photography, artifact plotting, field notes and forms
- Essential artifact curation procedures
- GPS spatial mapping and open-air pedestrian site recording
- Application of archaeological theory and method in the field

FIELDWORK SCHEDULE

Session 1-3: The duration of the field school will all be conducted at Pala Vieja Rockshelter (41PS209) located in Pinto Canyon of Presidio County, Texas. This shelter is approximately 56 km southwest of Marfa, Texas, and is within the eastern portion of the Trans-Pecos region and the northern extension of the Chihuahua Desert. The landscape is characterized by arid volcanic uplands between the Rio Grande Valley and Marfa Plain. The shelter has a history of looting, captured in the name Pala Vieja, after the old shovel and screen still found in the shelter. The Center for Big Bend Studies (CBBS) of Sul Ross State University has mapped the site using LiDAR and photogrammetry, tested the depth of the deposits, and attempted to determine the extent of deposits not affected by illicit digging. This field school officially begins archaeological excavation at Pala Vieja and will introduce students to a variety of excavation and mapping methods in a complex rock shelter. In addition, we will explore other sites including rock art and map open-air sites in Pinto Canyon to introduce students to other common archaeological reconnaissance performed in professional settings. We will end by writing our findings from our initial excavations for publication in our local CBBS Journal of Big Bend Studies.

Session 1 – 5/27to 6/5

5/31	6/1	6/2	6/3	6/4	6/5	6/6	6/7	6/8	6/9
Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	PCR field day	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Pedestrian survey	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Travel

Session 2 – 6/14 to 6/23

6/14	6/15	6/16	6/17	6/18	6/19	6/20	6/21	6/22	6/23
Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Pedestrian survey	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	PCR field day	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Travel

Session 3 – 6/27 to 7/6

6/27	6/28	6/29	6/30	7/1	7/2	7/3	7/4	7/5	7/6
Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	PCR field day	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Pala Vieja	Report writing	Report writing	Travel

4 Day Breaks: Between the three ten-day sessions there are four-day breaks to do laundry and recuperate. A block of dorm rooms on the Sul Ross campus has been set aside for you to stay in during the break.

Travel: Transportation to and from the site is provided, each student needs to arrange travel to Sul Ross State University to arrive by the first session date and transportation home after the last session.

SITE OVERVIEW

Diagnostic projectile points found predominately in front of the Pala Vieja Rockshelter suggest the archaeological record represented at Pala Vieja spans the Late Archaic through Protohistoric periods. The rockshelter is situated in mountainous uplands 12 miles off the Rio Grande and immediately adjacent to exposed bedrock tinajas offering a source of water and extra attraction for ancient people.

Given the size and location of Pala Vieja Rockshelter, and the reliable source of water, there is high potential for stratified Archaic through historic cultural deposits. Remnants of domesticated cultigens and cordage have already been found on the surface. Over the past 100 years, looters have disturbed much of the site, but the disturbance has generally been limited to the front of the rockshelter deposits and to an unknown depth. Deposits appear fully intact towards the rear of the shelter. The field school this season will open the first professionally dug windows into the Pala Vieja deposits.

GRADING:

Assignment	Points
1.) Attendance	150 points
2.) Field Notebook	100 points
3.) Daily Participation	150 points
4.) Engagement	100 points
Total	**500**

1.) **Attendance:** Simple. You must be present to learn how to conduct fieldwork.
2.) **Field Notebook:** Learning how to keep an accurate fieldnote book is essential to the field sciences. You will be provided with a fieldnote book and we will discuss what to keep in a notebook. This practice is the foundation for good research and is best developed early.
3.) **Daily Participation:** Your daily participation in the excavation and discussions at the site is the foundation for archaeological research and is a major requirement for the course.
4.) **Engagement:** Archaeological research is only successful with solid collaboration and communication. Central to both is engagement. I want you to ask questions often; if you do not understand a topic keep asking questions until you do. Engage with researchers on site, ask questions of their research and participate when possible.

Education outcomes:

- Formal field instruction in excavation mapping.
- Formal instruction in field photographic techniques and problems (lighting, camera settings, closeups, etc.).
- Formal instruction in laboratory methods including the research plan, long-range goals, overview of culture(s) being investigated, field problems, curation, and reporting plans.

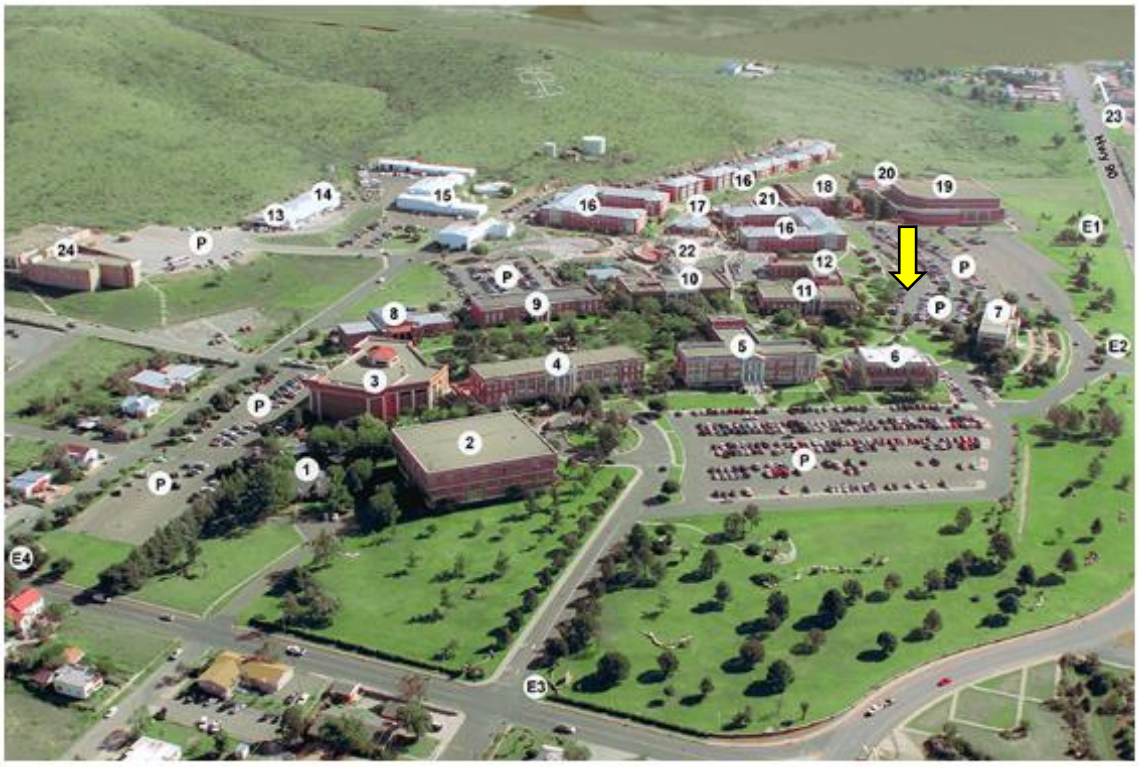
- Learn how to manage and take daily systematic notes as parts of the permanent record.
- Learn data and record responsibility as an integrated component of professional fieldwork.
- Understand the long-term objectives of archaeological fieldwork.

Required Field Gear (NOT provided)

- Personal gear (whatever you need to be comfortable in the desert)
- Backpack (day hiking size large enough for 3 liters water, lunch, jacket, flashlight and other personal tools/accessories)
- Toiletries (including bath towel and sandals for shower)
- Sunscreen
- Flashlight
- Tent with ground cloth/tarp
- Sleeping bag/pillow (cotton sheets or bag liner also recommended)
- Both warm and cold weather clothing for desert (basic washing can be performed in a bucket at the fieldhouse, I recommend enough clothes for three work days, plus additional comfortable camp and town clothes)
    - Sun protective shirts (sun hoodies or light weight but durable button-ups)
    - Durable but breathable work/hiking pants
    - Light cushion wool work/hiking socks
    - Light jacket for cool mornings and evenings
    - Shoes: durable hiking shoes and comfy camp shoes (and old sneakers for the rockshelter if you have them)
    - Full-brimmed hat
    - Sunglasses
- Work Gloves (leather and nitrile)
- Sunscreen
- Water bottles

Provided Gear

Excavation gear
Knee pads
Dust masks
Food
Transportation



1. President's Home
2. Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library
3. Morgan University Center
4. Briscoe Administration Building
5. Morelock Academic Building
6. Academic Computer Resource Center
7. Lawrence Hall and Cactus Garden
8. McCoy Building (Museum of the Big Bend)
9. Francois Fine Arts Building
10. Warnock Science Building
11. Ferguson Hall
12. Fletcher Hall
13. Industrial Technology Building
14. Ceramics and Sculpture Building
15. Physical Plant
16. Lobo Village Housing Complex
17. Residential Living Office
18. Graves-Pierce Complex
19. Pete P. Gallego Center
20. Tennis Courts
21. Swimming Pool
22. Zuzu Verk Memorial Amphitheater
23. Range Animal Science Center
24. Mountainside

OFF CAMPUS MEETING

We will meet behind Ferguson Hall in the parking lot before every field school session @ 8:00 am at the beginning of each 10-day session. PLEASE DO NOT SHOW UP LATE. The parking lot behind Ferguson is indicated on the map by the Yellow Arrow. This is also where we will return after every ten-day session (unless other arrangements have been made). If you cannot be on time, **PLEASE** contact me and let me know when you will arrive so that we are all not waiting on anyone.

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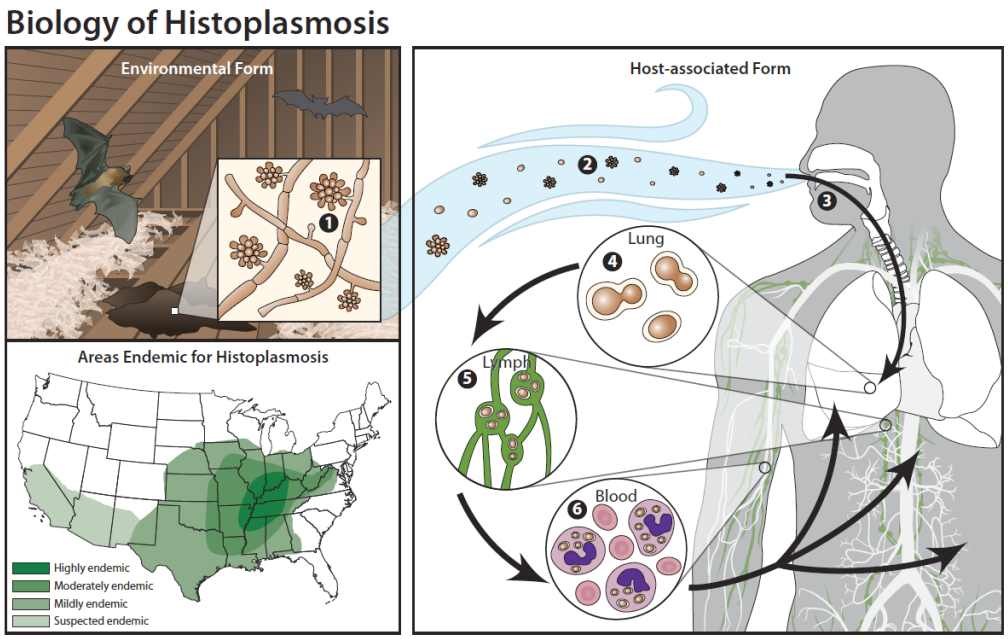
Risks of Cave/Shelter Archaeology

Histoplasmosis

"Acute pulmonary histoplasmosis is a respiratory infection that is caused by inhaling the spores of the fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum*."

It is most common in areas where bat or bird droppings are prevalent and become disturbed (i.e. caves and rockshelters). Most people from Texas and the American West have been exposed and are immune to the spores, but there is a very small percentage of people that are not immune. According to the CDC website "In the United States, an estimated 60% to 90% of people who live in areas surrounding the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys (where *Histoplasma* is common in the environment) have been exposed to the fungus at some point during their lifetime." SRSU and CBBS is providing preventative gear and wanted to field school participants to be aware of the symptoms and seek treatment should any of them develop any of the below list.



In the environment, *Histoplasm capsulatum* exists as a mold (1) with aerial hyphae. The hyphae produce macroconidia and microconidia (2) spores that are aerosolized and dispersed. Microconidia are inhaled into the lungs by a susceptible host (3). The warmer temperature inside the host signals a transformation to an oval, budding yeast (4). The yeast are phagocytized by immune cells and transported to regional lymph nodes (5). From there they travel in the blood to other parts of the body (6).

There are no tests to see if you have been exposed, but please be aware of the symptoms:

Symptoms:	**Preventive Gear:**
Chest Pains	Dust masks
Chills	Tyvek Suits
Cough	Multiple showering and handwashing stations.
Fever	
Joint Pain and Stiffness	
Muscle aches and stiffness.	
Rash (usually small sores on the lower legs)	
Shortness of breath	

Dangerous Wildlife

The rule with wildlife is always to stay calm and keep a safe distance. Do not try to approach closely just to capture an picture! ***If you are bitten by a snake or insect, remain calm.*** Most biting snakes and insects are painful but not dangerous unless you have an allergic reaction. Moving rapidly or getting excited elevates the heart rate and helps spread venom quicker through the body. Try to identify the thing that bit you, if possible taking pictures with a smartphone. Never attempt to suck out poison, cut into a bite, or take pain medicine. We are not qualified to provide aid to treat venomous bites. If you were bitten by something venomous, the best course of action is calm transportation to the hospital in Alpine, TX for treatment by a professional. In most cases care will not require anti-venoms.

Venomous snakes

The Trans-Pecos region includes copperheads and various kinds of rattlesnakes. These venomous snakes are fairly calm, and rattlesnakes will attempt to warn you if you get too close.

Mohave rattlesnake

Trans-Pecos copperhead

Venomous insects

The Trans-Pecos region includes venomous spiders and scorpions, the worst of these are the black widow spider. Black widow spider bites can be very painful, but generally not dangerous, and anti-venoms are only administered for pain and psychological treatment.

Black Widow spider

Brown widow spider

Other fauna and flora

Most plants in the Trans-Pecos seem out to get us, wear durable clothing and always watch for thorns and spines. Do not touch prickly pear cacti even if they don't appear to have spines, they always have small spines that can embed in you in the hundreds. Last, javelina are peccaries that can be observed around the fieldhouse. These animals are harmless but do not approach them, they do have sharp tusks and will defend themselves if provoked.