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Caddos Join 1992 Field School

The Texas Archeological Society's Annual Field School, held in June in Red River county in northeast Texas, included an unusual and educational program as part of the scientific investigations of several prehistoric and early historic Caddoan sites. The program, "The Caddo Indians and Caddoan Archaeology: Bridging the Past With the Present by Mutual Appreciation and Understanding," was sponsored by The Archeological Conservancy and made possible, in part, by a grant from the Texas Committee for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by individual contributors.

The Texas Archeological Society's 1991 Field School provided the first chance for the Caddo to become actively involved in the archaeological investigation of their ancestral lands. This year's program expanded the weekend activities to include many events that afforded opportunities for the Caddo and the archaeological community to exchange information and learn from each other. Approximately 40 Caddo attended the 1992 Field School.

The Caddo enjoyed a visit to the Museum of the Red River, made possible by the museum's founder and director Mary Herron of Idabel, Oklahoma. Dr. James Corbin, an archaeologist with Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, assisted with the tour, and presented an in-depth look at the various examples of Caddoan pottery in the museum's collection. His presentation focused on the different types and time period of the pottery samples, with emphasis on the methods of production and techniques used for decoration.

The museum visit was followed by an afternoon workshop, conducted by Dr. Corbin, titled "Traditional Caddoan Pottery Replication." Dr. Corbin brought three vessels to the workshop that he had previously made and that were dry enough for firing. A fire was built in the way that it is thought the Caddo fired their ceramics, and the pieces were fired during the course of the afternoon.

Although there are presently more than 3,000 members of the Caddo tribe, there is no one producing the pottery, as that part of their heritage has long been lost. There is, however, enthusiastic interest among the Caddo for the reintroduction of their ceramics. The interest generated by the workshop has prompted both the Caddo

and the archaeologists to plan future activities during which the Caddo will have more opportunities to learn about a very special part of their heritage. Preservation of this legacy, while bringing a renewed and enhanced appreciation of part of the Caddoan past, may also reap economic benefits for the tribe.

On Saturday evening, the Caddo presented some of their traditional dances, with tribal members participating in beautiful costumes. Leonard Williams, Caddo tribe chairman, briefly described each dance, and field school attendees and local visitors were invited to join the dancing.

The next morning, the Caddo visited two of the excavation sites. The Fasken Site, consisting of two mounds, is owned and managed by The Archeological Conservancy. Prior to the 1991 Field School, virtually nothing was known about these mounds except that they were Caddoan in origin. Excavations and research during the past two years of field schools has revealed interesting and sometimes unexpected information about the lifeways of the area's past inhabitants. The Caddo who visited the sites were generous in sharing information about their ancestor's lifeways, much of which they learned as children from their elders.

The exchange of information reminded those participating in the field school that oral history is a valuable part of any archaeological research.

This project, which will hopefully be the beginning of more joint projects between the Caddos and the archaeological community, is a great example of what can be done to learn more about the unique history of Texas, if we all work together. We can preserve our heritage — a treasured gift from the past — and a legacy for the future.



Above: Dr. James Corbin teaches Caddo pottery. Bottom: Caddo women try their hand at making pottery. Photos by Bonnie McKeel.

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