

DOING ARCHAEOLOGY: MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE

by Bonnie Christensen

One evening in the archaeology lab on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, a group of teachers listen to an introduction on identifying and reporting new archaeological sites, but the intense face of a high school student stands out. The guest of one of the precollegiate teachers attending the "Archaeology for Teachers" course, Ryan has a life-long dream--to become an archaeologist. His excitement shows as he enthusiastically asks questions of the archaeologist, who identifies and describes the projectile points and artifacts Ryan and others have brought to the class.

For Ryan, that evening sorting through his treasured collection of arrowheads gleaned from the fields of his family's farm, will change and challenge the rest of his life. Since then, Ryan has graduated from high school, is pursuing a college degree in archaeology, and is employed in the summer with the archaeological field crew at the University.

Not all stories that have roots in the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center's (MVAC) Archaeology in Education Program are as dramatic as Ryan's. But, turning young students and their teachers on

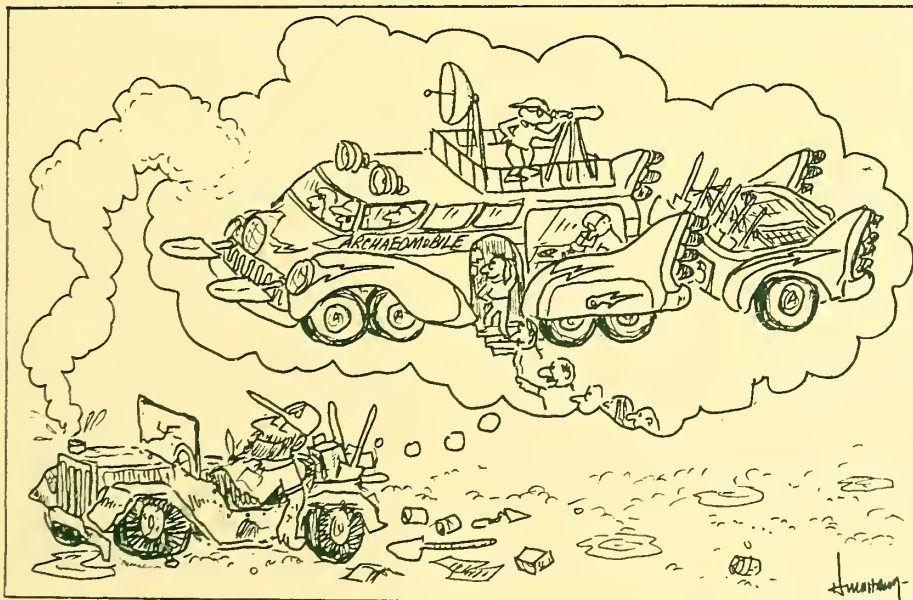
to learning about archaeology, cultivating and nurturing an interest in the science of archaeology and the history of the area's past people, and developing an awareness of and the desire to preserve cultural resources underscore MVAC's unique educational outreach mission and program.

Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center

Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center, a private non-profit organization located at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, conducts research on the upper Mississippi River region and educates the public about the science of archaeology and the early people of the region. In addition to its reputation for high standards in archaeological research, MVAC now offers a variety of ways for the public to become involved in archaeology. These include short lectures, numerous course offerings, summer camps for youth of all ages (kindergarten through high school), family events, laboratory opportunities, artifact identification days, field trips, excavation experience in field schools, and participation in actual archaeological research alongside professional archaeologists.

MVAC's Archaeology in Education Program

In 1990 MVAC began a concentrated effort towards archaeology education for precollegiate



teachers and students and, at that time, created an Archaeology in Education Program. Initially, offering speakers for classroom presentations and civic groups, the program included a collection of books and audio visual materials that teachers and the general public could access. Bringing together that assemblage of materials illustrated just how limited, outdated, and/or scientifically inaccurate much of the area's existing resource base was, as offered by area libraries and school media resource centers.

Today the Archaeology in Education Program offers various courses, information booths at conferences around the state, in-service workshops, field trips and lectures through which teachers are introduced to the science of archaeology and the pre-European and post-Contact history of the area. An "Archaeology for Teachers" course is offered for undergraduate or graduate credit. Many of MVAC's other offerings (workshops and field trips) provide clock hours that can be used by teachers towards state relicensing. Field schools and laboratory classes afford the ultimate hands-on opportunity for teachers to participate in actual scientific research and at the same time offer concepts they can use to introduce their students to all curricula areas using archaeology as a thematic focus.

MVAC's goal for precollegiate educators is not just to enlighten them about archaeology but to have instructors implement lessons on archaeology in their classroom year after year. To accomplish this goal, the Center believes that training teachers and turning them on to archaeology is not enough. It is imperative to support instructors once they return to the classroom. The Archaeology in Education program offers a variety of support services including two Wisconsin-licensed precollegiate instructors with extensive training in archaeology, resource materials, presentations, and a newsletter. The staff is available to help teachers find resources, answer content questions and provide whatever support instructors need to implement archaeology in their classroom.

Resource materials for use in the classroom include an extensive array of: 1) resource boxes that contain a variety of materials---books, videos, bulletin boards; 2) book boxes of various types that provide multiple copies of a single book title along with supporting materials; and 3) activity boxes that contain all the materials for an instructor to conduct an exciting hands-on activity session in the classroom. Materials are not all specifically based on archaeology and topics are as diverse as: Native American Art and Music, The Fur Trade Era, Rock Art, and Native American Folklore. With this assortment, teachers can put up a bulletin board, conduct a lesson or a complete unit, or create a learning center. Students can touch a traditional wooden flute or recovered artifacts, wear an authentic tinkle-cone or jingle dress, grind corn using a mano and metate, and in dozens of other ways explore how various people lived, adapted to their past environments, and continue today to preserve many of their traditions. Materials are loaned for a fee for a specified period of time; these materials are often booked months, even semesters in advance.

The Archaeology in Education Program provides classroom presentations ranging from large group lecture/slide shows to small group hands-on activities. Several presentations are available for teachers to choose from, or activities can be planned to fit individual needs. There are also lab tours, field trips to archaeological sites or excavations, and opportunities for students to participate in specially scheduled archaeological excavations and laboratory activities.

The newsletter, distributed four times throughout the school year, includes content information, lesson plans (usually designed by instructors), upcoming events, book reviews, information on sites to visit, and columns recognizing instructors for their participation in archaeology.

Making Dreams Come True

For many folks of all ages, MVAC's educational program offerings broaden their knowledge and

interest not only in archaeology, but also in many other inter-related fields. For a group of twenty squirming third through fifth grade students, flashlights in hand, huddled under a low ceiling of the dark reaches of a damp cave observing and learning about pre-European rock art panels, it is hard to determine which one, if any of them, will



grow up to be an archaeologist, a museum curator, a geoarchaeologist, a photographer, a historian, a cartographer or a technical illustrator. What is certain is the enthusiasm of these selected youngsters, part of a pilot spiral-curriculum project at La Crosse's North Woods Elementary School, who returned to their classrooms to report and to teach their fellow classmates about their archaeology experiences.

For a group of fourth graders, from La Crosse's Southern Bluffs Elementary, their experiences included walking plowed fields to search for cultural artifacts left from not only pre-European occupants but also from the small Mormon community that inhabited the coulee over a century ago. Besides contributing information to a current research project, the experience resulted in an exhibit in their school's media center and knowledge and memories that will last for their lifetimes. Similarly, almost twenty youngsters turned out on a Saturday morning to participate in an archaeological survey of a city park to determine whether or not valuable archaeological resources would be jeopardized by the building of a playground. Their supervised survey concluded that the playground could be safely built and at the same time gave these youngsters hands-on insight and exposure to the

archaeological process. The experience also gave them a notable distinction and pride in the development of their community.

For one retired high school teacher, Don, a lifelong dream of becoming involved in archaeology has resulted in his voluntary participation in successive summer field schools. There, Don inspires other teachers and continues to mentor to the high school students. A group of at-risk middle and high school students from around the region will long remember their week-long participation in an excavation at the site of an early fur-trade post (Perrot State Park, Trempealeau, WI) and will remember Don's guiding hand as they carefully shovel tested for the first time. Another high school teacher, Bruce, has completely re-designed his art curriculum to include projects inspired by his archaeological experiences. Still another teacher, Le Vern, who once had only a fascination in archaeology, now enjoys giving flintknapping demonstrations throughout the area and is of tremendous value to the state's regional archaeologist, having located and documented twenty-one previously unrecorded sites just within the past year. A former housewife with college-aged children of her own, Kathleen beams with joy over her recently completed undergraduate degree in archaeology from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and her part-time job at Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center's laboratory, where she helps supervise undergraduate students and catalogs and curates artifacts. "Every morning, I get up and say to myself, I'm living a dream," Kathleen tells visitors to the lab.

For Ryan, Don, Bruce, Le Vern, and Kathleen and for, indeed, thousands of people throughout western Wisconsin, eastern Minnesota and northeast Iowa, MVAC's Archaeology in Education Program has offered far more than satisfaction for a short-lived whim. For many, it has changed their lives. Because of the program's focus on educators and youth, even if the program ended today, its effects would continue to impact irreplaceable cultural resources, attitudes toward preservation, and without question, the shaping of public awareness and policy for years to come.

Fortunately, with respect to the future of the program, there is no intention of ending any time soon and, in fact, over the years thoughtful and intelligent growth has been conservatively approached and implemented as funding has increased. A recent National Endowment for the Humanities matching grant is being used to encourage contributions that will increase an endowment fund that partially supports the center's public education program. To use an archaeological phrase, MVAC believes that its public education efforts have just "skimmed the surface." Future dreams and plans include the beginnings of a model statewide network to serve archaeology education throughout the region. With enough funding and human resources, a mobile van housing a mini museum and archaeology classroom would better service rural areas; an in-laboratory classroom; an internet link; an on-campus, hands-on "model" excavation and much more could be done.

When Dr. James P. Gallagher, founder and executive director of the MVAC organization, arrived in La Crosse in 1977, virtually no formal archaeological research had been done in the area and skeptics scoffed at its importance. From a staff of one with an obsolete, donated computer to a staff of ten archaeologists, two educators and seasonal crews that can add an additional twenty to the staff, MVAC has indeed proven in many ways that for many, dreams can come true. The University of Wisconsin- La Crosse is now included in the limited number of universities in the nation that offer an undergraduate program in archaeology, and MVAC's Archaeology in Education Program is unique in its specific focus on involving and providing continual support to teachers and precollegiate students.

Starting Your Own Archaeology Education Program

The beginnings of MVAC'S Archaeology in Education Program in 1990 were the result of a desire to create more effective ways to work with the precollegiate audience that the Center was often asked to address. We created hands-on activities

that actively involved students in our presentations. MVAC found that classrooms were not always prepared for the presentations, so a library of books and teacher guides was gathered for instructors to use with their students before and after MVAC's presentations. Teachers, however, found visiting the library inconvenient and researching references time-consuming. We, therefore, combined existing materials and purchased and formatted complementary resources to create our first resource boxes to circulate throughout the schools.

Teachers wanted more background information and MVAC created the "Archaeology for Teachers Class." MVAC's "Archaeology Field School for Teachers" was introduced because teachers wanted to participate in field excavations but also wanted credit for relicensing and to help them move up on their pay scales. Because teachers requested information on interrelated topics and wanted activities that were not as time consuming as extended courses, MVAC's series of workshops was implemented.

Looking back, the small changes and additions to MVAC' s Archaeology in Education Program have taken the organization a greater distance and in different directions than originally envisioned in 1990. Central to the growth, however, has always been our desire to listen to the needs of both archaeologists and the precollegiate instructors that MVAC works with, and our wish to make the program mutually beneficial. Just as important are MVAC's long term commitment to teachers and to the dual training of MVAC's educational staff. For those organizations just beginning to design or implement programs of their own, MVAC suggests endeavors that can be realistically accomplished even though, at this time, they might seem small or insignificant. Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center's journey is far from over and the future growth of the educational outreach program will continue to come from those small, seemingly insignificant actions--each individual phone call, each presentation, each report or meeting.

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If any educator desires to become involved in archaeology, a great way to get started is by contacting the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), and finding out if your state has an Educational Network Coordinator, who can provide information on what educational offerings are available in your state. The SAA's Public Education Committee has available a variety of materials to assist instructors in bringing archaeology into their classroom. SAA offers a Newsletter for instructors three times throughout the school year (\$10), a sampler of lessons on archaeology, and a bibliography of materials on archaeology. For more information on any of these materials, contact: Brigid Brady-de Lambert at (202) 789-8200. For the name of the SAA Educational Network Coordinator in your state, contact Beverly Mitchum at (412) 527-5585.

For more information about Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center and its programs, contact Bonnie Christensen, Director of Public Education, Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, 1725 State Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601, (608) 785-8454.

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NEW RESOURCE

Archaeology in the Classroom: A Resource Guide for Teachers and Parents describes a wide range of educational materials and resources for introducing children, from kindergarten through high school, to archaeology. This volume is organized into three parts: General Resources (e.g. books, films, magazines, computer games); Resources by Subject Area (e.g. the Americas, Greece, Rome, Africa, Near East); and Supplementary Bibliography. Indexes in the back of the book organize resources by location, grade level, culture, and specialized topics. Lastly, the guide, under Supporting Materials, provides additional useful information such as internet resources, a bibliography for parents and teachers, lists of Society for American Archaeology Education Coordinators, state historic preservation officers and state archaeologists, and affiliated institutions and related organizations. The cost of the publication is \$9 for AIA member, \$10.50 for non-member, plus \$4 for shipping and handling and 50 cents for each additional copy. Write: Kendall-Hunt Publishing Co., Order Dept., 4050 Westmark Dr., Dubuque, IA 52002; (800) 228-0810.

