

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: Last Canyon Cave Salvage Excavation in MT
Type of Project: Research
Project Discipline: Cultural
Funding Agency: Bureau of Land Management
Other Partners/Cooperators: University of Wyoming
Effective Dates: 10/1/2007 - 8/1/2009
Funding Amount: \$34,000
Investigators and Agency Representative: Investigator: Marcel Kornfeld, Department of Anthropology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY, (307) 766-3548, anpro1@uwyo.edu
<p>Project Abstract:</p> <p>The past rockshelter research leans many unanswered questions about the shelters and their human occupants. Most of the rockshelter investigations in the Bighorn region were conducted 30-40-years ago, with some studies conducted over 50 years ago, Archaeological theory and methods have substantially increased in quantity and quality of the data in interpretation potential over this period of time. Revisiting previously investigated shelters as well as initiating studies of newly discovered shelters has potential to enhance our understanding of Bighorn region rockshelter use and the region's pre-history.</p> <p>There are many simple questions about closed site archaeology left by previous investigations. Such questions address: shelter formation and sedimentation, cultural occupation relative to geologic deposition, deposit architecture, paleoenvironmental conditions, paleoenvironmental associations of cultural components, as well as why some shelters were occupied while others were not. Do the components represent single or multiple occupations? What is the nature of these occupation, periodicity, re-occupation tempo, and so on? It is unlikely that these questions, important for understanding shelter use and their relationship to other sites as well as the cultural systems, can be answered with any of the extant day (previously excavated shelters).</p> <p>Another relevant question is whether bedrock was reached in the excavated shelters and whether deeper archaeological deposits are present. If older human occupations are present and not known, then our interpretation about human use of the shelters and the region is skewed by the false negative (i.e., shelters were not occupied). For instance, we may think that the shelters wither were not used, or were used sporadically prior to a certain time, while in fact the shelters are simply not completely excavated. A corollary of this issue, fluted point use of shelters in North America, has been a matter of debate for some time. The debate revolves around whether the lack of prehistoric cultural materials in rockshelters at this early time of American prehistory (greater than 10,000 BP) is a function of the fact that: 1) shelters were not used; 2) shelter deposits have eroded away; or 3) shelter deposits no longer lie within the shelters themselves but in aprons further outside because the shelters have collapsed. To evaluate these and other possibilities, the entire shelter chronostratigraphy must be dated and excavated down to bedrock and shelter aprons must be tested.</p> <p>To deal with some of the unanswered questions in rockshelter research in the Bighorn region, we are revisiting many previously excavated shelters and conducting additional studies in them, including re-recording the profiles in greater detail, collecting granulometric, paleoenvironmental, chronological, and other samples, and surveying, recording and testing shelters throughout the region.</p>
<p>Outcomes with completion dates (reports, publications, workshops, videos, etc.): Final report due: 8/1/2009</p>
<p>Keywords: rockshelter research; human occupation, Bighorn region, Bureau of Land Management, University of Wyoming</p>