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Science website names Dr. Shawn Bubel's archaeological find the second most interesting discovery of 2015

A decade's worth of work from the University of Lethbridge's Dr. Shawn Bubel (BSc '96) on a 2,500-year-old bison kill site proved to be one of the most interesting discoveries of 2015, according to the scientific website Western Digs.

Bubel's discovery of non-utilitarian upright features at the ancient Fincastle Bison Kill Site was the second most viewed and shared story among [Western Dig's Top 5 Archaeology Discoveries in the American West of 2015](#).

"It is pretty exciting. I have been directing this project since 2003 but I didn't publish our discoveries right away because there was so much material to go through," says Bubel, an archaeologist and faculty member in the U of L's Department of Geography. "I wanted to get a more comprehensive understanding of the site first. To be getting the publicity now seems strange because we uncovered many of these finds several years ago."



The Fincastle site, located amongst the sand dunes of southeastern Alberta, is remarkable for the massive amount of cultural remains present, more than 200,000 fragments of bison bone, as well as for the stories it tells and the mysteries it still holds.

Unlike many other kill sites, this is not a bison-jump site but one where sheer cunning and stalking likely allowed hunters to ambush a bison herd as it watered in marshy land tucked between sand dunes, limiting escape routes. Its finds were many, including a host of projectile points that suggest ties to the Dakota region.

Where it really gets interesting though is what was found under the layer of bone debris – seven upright bone features that were clearly constructed for a reason still unknown.

“We found the first one in 2004 and it was beautiful, but we didn’t think too much of it as there was no clear cultural indication of its function,” says Bubel. “When we started to find more of them and saw how they were positioned, it was obvious that these features were different than anything we had seen before.”

The uprights are deliberately arranged bones embedded in the earth. One of the most striking examples features a tibia surrounded by four bison mandibles, or jawbones, with the teeth fanning out.

“There is one other site that has something similar to it, but all we know is that they are not utilitarian,” says Bubel. “It is likely something ceremonial, but what it is exactly, no one knows. There are no stories from our Elders about these features, so it is a mystery.”

Bubel will continue to study the artifacts from Fincastle in the hopes of one day unlocking its secrets, and is thrilled to have been a part of such a significant find.

“It is definitely a rarity and not your normal discovery at an archaeological site on the plains.”

Bubel will speak to her findings at Thursday’s PUBLIC Professor Series lecture at Lethbridge City Hall. Her presentation, Prehistoric Bison Hunters in Southern Alberta: Excavations at Fincastle Site, begins at 7 p.m. Appetizers and a cash bar are available.

The Western Digs article can be found at: <http://westerndigs.org/2500-year-old-bison-kill-site-offers-new-clues-into-ancient-culture-of-northern-plains/>.

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Contact:

Trevor Kenney, News & Information Manager
403-329-2710
403-360-7639 (cell)
trevor.kenney@uleth.ca

Dr. Shawn Bubel, Department of Geography
403-329-2531
bubest@uleth.ca