

T Tracks



Sam Noble Museum

Fall 2013 Newsletter Vol. 25, No. 3



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TRACKS, FALL 2013: VOLUME 25 NO. 3

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OUR MISSION

The Sam Noble Museum at the University of Oklahoma inspires minds to understand the world through collection-based research, interpretation, and education.

OUR VISION

As one of the finest museums, we are at the heart of our community, collectively working to inspire understanding, appreciation, and stewardship of the earth and its peoples.

TRACKS

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Thanks to our 2013 Corporate Benefactors:



From the Director



As we approach the end of 2013, a number of museums across the country are cutting back on staffing or programs, or even considering closing their doors, unable to survive the many months of economic downturn and very slow recovery. The Sam Noble Museum at the University of Oklahoma has managed to do well during this period, though we, too, have had budget cuts. We also restructured following a wave of retirements. We have fewer staff but have expanded the duties of many staff members to continue to meet our programmatic, curatorial, and service requirements. On the other hand, we hired three curators — Drs. Katrina Menard (Recent Invertebrates), Marc Levine (Archeology) and Cameron Siler (Herpetology) — and a collection manager (Dr. Brandi Coyner) and registrar (Dr. Elsbeth Dowd). We also replaced numerous positions across the museum following staff departures.

Increasing our exhibit space in 2012 by adding the new Higginbotham Gallery picked up the pace of work for all of the staff, from the Exhibits Department to curators to collection managers to the registrar. We had five exhibits go on display this year. All were excellent and as different from one from another in theme and style as the diversity of research and collections a major museum requires. Whether visitors came to see life size sculptures of bugs, spectacular photographs of spiders, an outstanding exhibit of wildlife art, or a collections of sports balls from around the world, they stepped into exciting worlds of new experiences and wonder. Our exhibits, educational programs and public programs lead the way in our public service. We help educate the public to understand the natural and cultural world and increase their scientific literacy, all in an entertaining way.

Tornadoes in the spring were devastating for many of our citizens. The museum opened its doors to offer complimentary admission from May 22 through the end of June. It is little enough to do to help our neighbors and volunteers from across the country, but a museum is an important part of a community. Perhaps all we could do is welcome you for a few hours of respite, give you a chance to bring the children to a place of enjoyment, a place away from the devastation, during what were difficult times for families.

We will continue to fulfill our mission and serve the public as we move into 2014. We will carry out cutting-edge and global research, service and teaching. By almost any standard, the Sam Noble Museum continues to be a pacesetter among university museums worldwide.

I look forward to your continued support of the museum as well as your continued enjoyment of the programs and exhibits planned for 2014. On behalf of everyone at the museum, I wish you and your family the season's best wishes of good health, peace and prosperity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M. Mares".

Michael A. Mares, Ph.D.
Director

End of an Era: Wann Langston, Jr. (1921-2013)

BY RICHARD CIFELLI, VERTEBRATE PALEONTOLOGY

Wann Langston Jr. was the last living link to the museum's Stovall-era fossil collecting program. Sadly, he died earlier this year at age 92. He was the son of a former dean of OU's School of Medicine, developed an early and lifelong affinity for fossils, and worked as a volunteer in the vertebrate paleontology lab not long after my predecessor, J.W. Stovall (1891–1953), arrived at OU in 1929.

Langston's association with vertebrate paleontology at OU spanned some nine decades — surely some kind of record. His interest, motivation and talent quickly impressed Stovall, who permitted him to take some of the museum's most important fossils home to prepare in the Langston family garage.

Wann was present when specimens poured into Norman as a result of Stovall's colossal collecting program (sponsored by Works Progress Administration) during the 1930s and 1940s. He prepared and restored many of the fossils. He participated in field-work beginning in 1938, when he found a horned dinosaur skeleton in Big Bend, Texas. This field area sustained Langston's interest throughout his career, yielding the fossil for which he is best known—the *pterosaur* *Quetzalcoatlus*. Wann also had a hand in collecting and preparing the museum's mounted *Tenontosaurus* (babies and adult) and *Pentaceratops*, among others.

Wann served in the Pacific during World War II following his graduation from OU in 1943. He returned to complete his master's thesis, wherein he described and named Oklahoma's state dinosaur, *Acrocanthosaurus*. He obtained his doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1952 and went on to become a leader in



Above: Wann Langston, second from right with site workers

vertebrate paleontology. He worked at the National Museum of Canada (1954–1963) and later at the University of Texas, Austin. Langston published over 100 scientific articles in his career and earned the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology's prestigious Romer-Simpson Medal in 2007. His work has been so influential that some two dozen fossil species have been named for him (including the *Paleomolops langstoni*, which I named in 1994).

Stovall's collection was amassed during a short period of intense effort. Regrettably, it was never properly curated and fell into disrepair by the 1950s. When I joined the museum in 1986, its condition was so poor that it seemed doubtful that most of the specimens would ever have any research value. That it has now been fully restored is largely due to the help of Langston, who spent several months in residence here as a retiree (1988), before the present museum was built or even conceived. His astonishing memory, encyclopedic knowledge and masterful technical skills helped piece specimens back together and associate (or reconstruct) their collecting data. Later, he served in an advisory capacity for the design and construction of the Sam Noble Museum's permanent exhibits, including the centerpiece "Clash of the Titans" display.

Langston's legacy, direct and indirect, continues. He was a mentor to museum preparator Kyle Davies. The stunning baby *Apatosaurus*, added to the museum's exhibit in 2011, was a direct result of skills Davies learned under Langston's direction. For his sustained efforts, encouragement, friendship to the vertebrate paleontology program and its staff, and contributions of all sorts (including a generous gift to the endowment), Wann Langston is without peer. We miss him.

Below: Black Mesa State Park



Bones of Black Mesa

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS

Nestled at the base of Black Mesa, the highest, driest point in Oklahoma, a crew of paleontologists stepped into the state's prehistoric past as they uncovered fossils from the Morrison Formation, a distinct sequence of Late Jurassic sedimentary rock. The findings include sauropod vertebrae, crocodillian teeth, pieces of ancient turtles, a theropod tooth, and a fossilized snail, all of which date back to roughly 150 million years ago.

The Morrison Formation contains an impressive collection of fossils and bones, including those listed above. Being on the southeastern tip of the formation, Oklahoma seldom receives paleontological attention like that given to surrounding states, such as Wyoming, Utah, Colorado or New Mexico. However, the wealth of discoveries around Black Mesa could ultimately alter the way scientists view Oklahoma's prehistoric panhandle.

Surprisingly, it was not a team of seasoned scientists or veteran researchers who unearthed the most recent finds. Rather, these discoveries can be credited to a team of 12 Oklahoma high school students, chosen in February to participate in an extraordinary educational experience. The work of the 2013 students was built on the efforts of the 2012 Paleo Expedition team that first explored the Homestead Quarry at Black Mesa last year.

The ExplorOlogy® Paleo Expedition Program is an educational outreach program of the Sam Noble Museum designed to give students a hands-on science

experience. Each summer, the program affords 12 Oklahoma high school students in ninth through 11th grade the opportunity to join professionals from the Sam Noble Museum and the Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences as they unearth fossils and collect field data at various locations within Oklahoma. The students do not need formal training or specialized experience, only a love for science.

Paleo Expedition was developed by the museum with funding for the first five years provided by the Whitten-Newman Foundation of Oklahoma City. It is the most popular educational activity of the Sam Noble Museum. The Whitten-Newman Foundation wished to jumpstart a modern science museum program for Oklahoma students with the goal of having this statewide program attract private funds from throughout Oklahoma. ExplorOlogy® has now served more than 53,000 students from 150 schools in 52 counties since its launch in 2007. Students participate in the 15-day adventure free of charge.

This year's expedition also included students in Native Explorers, a program that recruits, trains and educates college-age Native Americans in science and medicine. Native Explorers also is funded by the Whitten-Newman Foundation.

The new location lies close to quarries previously discovered by the museum's first director, J. Willis Stovall. Through Stovall's Works Progress Administration-funded "Fossil Bones Project," some 30,000 specimens were unearthed between 1935 and 1942. Regrettably, Stovall's pursuits ended alongside the WPA, and scientific quarrying stopped for more than half a century. Established by Whitten-Newman



Above: A sauropod vertebrae still embedded in the soil

and ExplorOlogy® two years ago, the Homestead site serves as the first professional quarry work in the area since before World War II.

Anne Weil, research associate at the Sam Noble Museum and associate professor at OSU-CHS, hopes the site will continue to be used “to further science education in Oklahoma.” According to Weil, “students participate in every part of quarrying, from digging out drainage to removing large jackets and drawing quarry maps scientifically.”

By opening up the quarry for education, the museum hopes to awaken within students a passion for the sciences as they experience the thrill of discovery.

This very excitement resonated deeply with many students of the 2013 program. Participants Morgan Miller of Buffalo and Gray McCutchen of Edmond both credited the Paleo Expedition program for steering them toward a future in science. These are certainly not the only participants to discover their calling on site with the program. Ernesto Vargas of Oklahoma City, a past participant of Oklahoma Science Adventure and Paleo Expedition, recently was named a Gates Millennium Scholar and will receive a full scholarship to attend the University of Chicago, where he intends to become an invertebrate paleontologist. Vargas is the second

ExplorOlogy® student to receive this award in the past two years, the other being Nancy Ha of Muskogee.

“I know it’s cliché, but there is nothing like actually doing something to get the best feeling for what it is like,” said Kyle Davies, museum preparator for the vertebrate paleontology department and Paleo Expedition mentor since 2009. “It is one thing to be told about something or to read about it, and another to do it.”

Paleo Expedition not only caters to budding scientists, but also fosters a unique, symbiotic relationship between educational outreach and museum research. According to Rich Cifelli, curator for the vertebrate paleontology department at the Sam Noble Museum, the mission of any museum should first and foremost be education. This is why, said Cifelli, Paleo Expedition “is a dream project for any museum.”

“Here’s one project that’s doing everything,” Cifelli said. “It’s potentially important for research, it yields new fossils for the collections and it’s a great educational natural laboratory for kids to study in.”

Aside from the educational component, Cifelli states that the finds from Black Mesa indicate that Oklahoma’s assemblage of dinosaurs differs from those of surrounding states, like Utah and New Mexico. By carefully researching the Black Mesa discoveries in a museum preparatory lab, paleontologists can more accurately reassemble the past.

The 2013 Paleo Expedition crew already has collected and stored two field jackets from the site, with the anticipation of more to follow. The ExplorOlogy® program intends to return to the quarry with a new Paleo Expedition crew in the summer of 2014 and will continue the progress of this year’s team. With support from such organizations as the Whitten-Newman Foundation, corporations, and private donors, ExplorOlogy® hopes to maintain programs like Paleo Expedition and continue providing Oklahoma students with an opportunity to discover science by being scientists.

The ExplorOlogy® program would like to thank the University of Oklahoma, the Sam Noble Museum’s Vertebrate Paleontology and Recent Invertebrates departments, Oklahoma State University, Native Explorers and the Whitten-Newman Foundation for making Paleo Expedition possible.



Above: Paleo Expedition student, Lauren Carroll works at the dig site

Spring 2014

Spike's Club: *In Motion*

Registration begins November 25 for members; December 9 for non-members



Deserts and Human History: *Part 1*

BY MICHAEL MARES, DIRECTOR



Above: Rainforest, photo by Laurie Vitt

Most of my research has been conducted in deserts throughout the world. Deserts are fascinating places. Not only are their mammals interesting, but deserts also have a long association with humanity.

Our own history has deep roots in the desert. Why should great civilizations have developed in arid and semiarid areas throughout the world, rather than in tropical forests? There are several good reasons. While it is true that such forests have great temperature stability and sufficient water for drinking, the high humidity, heat and constant moisture of the rainforest prepare a person to become food for the bacteria, flies, mosquitoes, roundworms, hookworms, amoebas and the other parasitic invertebrates, fungi and viruses that seek a warm-blooded host in which to reproduce or feed. Perhaps people found that by leaving the tropical rainforest, with its abundance of life—from microbes to predators—they survived longer in the rigorous, but relatively parasite- and predator-free habitat of the desert.

Trees in tropical rainforests may reach dizzying heights of 150 feet or more. On the human scale, these forests have been likened to walking inside a cathedral. If you have ever visited Saint Peter's Cathedral in Rome, you have experienced the manner in which that great edifice, designed so many centuries ago by Michelangelo, reduces the human size to the point of insignificance by its very scale. Walking between the columns and moving under the dome, we are made small in that church, as Michelangelo believed that we are small in relation to God. The cathedral thus has divine, rather than human,

proportions. Like a cathedral, a tropical rainforest with its seemingly limitless array of biological skyscrapers, limits one's view of the heavens, and thus may limit one's vision of other things as well.

The great South American Amazon rainforest at one time extended unbroken from east to west for almost 2,400 miles. To put this in context, if one flew from Seattle to New York City, the distance covered on the long five-hour flight is the width of the Amazon Basin. Such is the scale of that great assemblage of forested ecosystems. The Amazon is not a homogeneous habitat, as it is sometimes depicted in the popular media, but differs among its diverse forests as greatly as do the deciduous and coniferous forests of North America. Nevertheless, the tropical rainforest is a habitat that defies humans to cross it, look over it, see its dimensions, or grasp its true scale.

In a rainforest, our views are limited to the occasional tree fall, where a gust of wind has uprooted a 150-foot-tall giant, tearing loose its shallow roots with their tenuous hold on the earth, and opening a small clearing in the dense forest. In such a clearing, we catch a glimpse of the sun or the moon, and we are able to see across a somewhat larger, though still greatly limited, area of forest. The tropical rainforest dominates us. Forest tribes are an integral part of the forest, and only a small part at that. Their widest vistas extend across rivers, where the green wall of rainforest seems smaller. In a rainforest, the bands of people are small, for they cannot imagine open plains or worlds to conquer. The forest is simply too



Above: Namib Desert, Gobabeb Namibia. Tropical does not always mean green forests.



Above: Negev Desert, Israel

encompassing and overpowering to permit dreams of empire. In the dense rainforest, the nights are dark and without stars, and without the stars, our imaginations of other worlds, or the limits of our own world, are restricted. Our sense of the pulse of the world, and the vibrant force of the universe, is diminished. Tropical rainforests limit our vision.

Our tropical ancestors possibly left the homogeneity and stability of the rainforest environment in order to escape the myriad of life forms, especially microbes, which preyed on humans. Could the original force that led people out of the rainforest, with its limited horizons and predictable climate, have been something as small as a virus? Perhaps. There are microbes in deserts, of course, but they have fewer hosts, and the arid desert is a much harsher habitat for a tiny parasite that can survive only for short periods out of water, than it is for a large mammal, such as a human. It is much less common for a desert dweller to be infected by a parasitic species than it is for an inhabitant of the wet tropical forest.

If humans were able to break free from the confines of the tropical forest, they were also able, concomitantly, to break free from many of the diseases that shortened their lives. Perhaps the very ability to coalesce human populations into towns and cities was a result of freedom from the infectious diseases that are associated with the tropical forest—diseases that are especially adept at spreading from one person to another when human populations are dense. By escaping at least some of our parasites, we were able to band together into ever-larger tribes, until societies and eventually civilizations were formed.

Whether or not this was a driving force to leave the forest for the savanna is unknown. But as humans left the forest, many things happened to our species to change it forever. Find out how we adapted to life on the savanna in our next edition of *TRACKS*.

Below: Vicuñas in the high puna desert of Catamarca Province, Argentina



The Art of Sport + Play Experience

Oct. 19, 2013 through Jan. 26, 2014

Author of the *Red Rubber Ball* series and motivational speaker, Kevin Carroll, has used sport and play to shape his entire life. His childhood obsession with the creativity and passion that accompanied sports turned into a career filled with opportunities to advocate for play in personal and business life.

Carroll's first exhibition is a personal look at selected pieces of memorabilia gathered from his travels throughout the world. At the heart of the collection is a group of handcrafted balls, created by children with found materials from their native lands.

With a playful spirit, this exhibit tells the story of the universal power of sport. Created for all audiences, the social and cultural issues described in the work are especially meaningful to artists, businesspeople and children. His message is simple and inspiring: we ALL PLAY + we ALL SPEAK BALL. *What's your Red Rubber Ball?* Visitors also have the opportunity to share their inspiration on a red paper ball, which could be displayed in the exhibit!

Learn how sport and play changes lives the world over through Carroll's first exhibition, *The Art of Sport + Play*, on display at the museum through Jan. 26, 2014.

Below: Opening reception for The Art of Sport + Play



Above: Masterworks exhibit on display in the Brown Gallery

Masterworks of Native American Art

*Selections from the
Fred and Enid Brown Collection*

Sept. 28, 2013, through Jan. 5, 2014

In the late 19th century, the forced movement of over 60 Native American groups to what is now the state of Oklahoma created one of the most unique cultural environments in modern North America.

The Native American fine arts movement of the 20th century represents a recent chapter in a long history of artistic expression by the indigenous people of North America. For thousands of years, the Native people of North America have created fantastic works of art in stone, ivory, metal, horn, shell, plant material, plaster and clay that were often embellished with pigments and painted designs.

This Masterworks exhibition presents a selection of Native American paintings and drawings created over the past half century, from ca. 1960-2013. The movement into a new century provides an opportunity to examine patterns of formal continuity and change in the artworks themselves, and the motivations, events and circumstances that inspire and guide their creation.

The Fred E. and Enid Brown Collection of Native American Art is the product of a lifetime of study and collecting. The Browns donated their collection to the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History in 1999. The collection now highlights the breadth and diversity of Native American art from the early 20th century through the present.

Museum Welcomes New Staff



Above: (left to right) Brandi Coyner, Cameron Siler and Andy Boring

This year the Sam Noble Museum welcomed Cameron Siler, curator of herpetology, Brandi Coyner, collection manager for mammalogy, and Andy Boring, collection manager for recent invertebrates.

Siler graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Texas at Austin. He earned a doctorate from the University of Kansas. He is a two-time Fulbright Scholar and has spent time studying in the Philippines. He came to the University of Oklahoma after working at the University of South Dakota.

Coyner graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 2005 with a bachelor's degree in zoology. She went on to receive her doctorate from Oklahoma State University. She has returned to OU after time as a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow at the University of Nevada, Reno.

Boring graduated from Auburn University with a bachelor's degree in zoology. He earned his doctorate in systematic entomology from the University of Kentucky. He came to the University of Oklahoma after working in Ohio.

"We are very excited to welcome Drs. Siler, Coyner and Boring to the museum and look forward to their developing outstanding careers working for the Sam Noble Museum," said museum director Michael Mares.

Museum Receives Awards

The Mountain-Plains Museums Association has announced the winners of the 2013 Publications Design Competition and the Technology Competition. The Sam Noble Museum received first place in the Brochures and Rack Cards category of the MPMA series of competitions, as well as an award for the museum's Online Presence for 2013. Included in the campaign were various social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and YouTube.

The Sam Noble Museum also was recognized at the Oklahoma Museum Association's Annual Fall Conference specifically for participation in the Top 10 Endangered Artifacts competition, in which the museum placed an object in the top 10 winners with its Spiro Lace. The museum is pleased to share this particular rare artifact with the public through this competition. The Oklahoma Cultural Heritage Trust, which sponsored the competition, provided a scholarship for the museum registrar to attend the conference and represent the museum.

The Spiro Lace was on exhibit when the museum opened in 2000. However, because of its extremely delicate state, it was removed in 2002. It is housed in the archaeology collections area, where it is protected from exposure to light and other sources of environmental degradation. This rare textile fragment gives us a glimpse into the world of more than 700 years ago, complementing the other archaeological evidence and oral traditions that shape our understanding of the past. In addition, about 100 other artifacts from the Spiro Mounds site are always on display in the People of Oklahoma gallery.

Below: Elsbeth Dowd, museum registrar, accepts the award



Journey of the Shells

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS

To many, science may seem to be a strictly objective discipline, black-and-white and void of emotional attachment. Sure, it takes passion, but science is seldom regarded as being sentimental in nature. However, this couldn't be further from the truth. Through its ability to reveal passions and spark inspiration, science has proven its ability to resonate on a most intimate level, as illustrated by Vicki Jackson and 150 drawers of seashells.

It all began on Sunday, July 28, 2013, when Jackson visited the Sam Noble Museum, carrying with her some 2,700 carefully boxed seashells. The collection was not hers, but her late father's, who had painstakingly retrieved the pieces from all across the world. Although Jackson's generous donation of the collection to our recent invertebrates department is in and of itself a marvelous tale, it is the story behind the shells that makes this gift truly extraordinary.

Jackson believes that her father, Perry Yates Jackson Jr., began collecting shells after attending and graduating from the Naval Academy many years ago. The collection, spanning primarily from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, includes shells from both familiar and wildly exotic locals: Florida, Virginia, California, Texas, Hawaii, Haiti, New Guinea, The West Indies and Seychelles, among others. The global nature of the collection stems largely from Perry Jackson Jr.'s service with the U.S. Navy.

"The Navy allowed him to go all over the place, and wherever they docked, if he had the time, he would



Above: Highly detailed classification system created by Jackson Jr.

shell hunt. It was almost a form of meditation," Jackson said.

The older Jackson was not only an avid collector, but also a dedicated organizer. Until his passing in 1998, he maintained a meticulous catalog of each and every item he recovered. According to Katrina Menard, curator for the Sam Noble Museum's recent invertebrates collection, this degree of care and organization is almost as rare as the shells themselves.

However, without her father's expertise and guiding hand, Jackson and her family lacked the knowledge and resources needed to maintain the collection. According to Jackson, no one has cared for the shells since 1998, and ultimately, this played a pivotal role in her decision to donate the nearly 3,000 pieces to the Sam Noble Museum.

"I've met staff from Sam Noble Museum at annual meetings of the American Society of Mammalogists, and a student of mine completed an internship there last summer in the mammology department. Everything I've heard has indicated that they would take excellent care of this collection," Jackson said.

Needless to say, the collection is very dear to Jackson as it symbolizes her father's passion for wildlife. Jackson recalled many fond memories from her childhood, roaming the beaches and woods with her parents in pursuit of specimens. This love of the natural world, and her father's sharp eye for detail, influenced her immensely as a young girl, and

continued

eventually guided her to a career in animal biology, as she is currently an associate professor of biology at the University of Central Missouri.

“This has been a great experience for me, allowing me to remember how meticulous my dad was and how much he encouraged me to grow up to be a biologist,” Jackson recalled.

In the same way that her father’s shells once influenced her, Jackson hopes to use her father’s legacy to inspire other budding scientists.

“Future generations build on the work of earlier generations, and by taking care of her father’s collection in perpetuity it will mean many future scientists can learn and be inspired by it as well,” said Menard.

As Menard mentioned, Jackson’s mission aligns precisely with the museum’s aspiration to encourage potential scientists through such programs as ExplorOlogy’s® Paleo Expedition and Oklahoma Science Adventure. Through these programs, the museum hopes to utilize the legacies of accomplished scientists, like Jackson Jr., to show up-and-coming researchers that science is not just about objective facts and numbers: *it’s about passion.*



Above: Perry Yates Jackson Jr.

Peck Grant Students Honored



Above: Tyler Hunt

Nathan L. Peck has had a lasting impact on more than a dozen University of Oklahoma undergraduate students, including two students this semester.

Most children have dreams to become something great when they grow up. Peck had dreams to become great at something specific: paleontology. Fortunately, the Peck family found a tangible way for their son’s legacy to grow into something that could help other students. Through the Nathan L. Peck Memorial Undergraduate Research Assistantship Fund, the Peck family provides assistance to students studying paleontology at OU.

After reviewing applications, museum curators selected Tyler Hunt and Danielle Brecheen as recipients of this generous grant for 2013. Both students have been involved with the Sam Noble Museum through previous programs, making them a perfect fit for the assistantships.

Thanks to the Peck family, Hunt and Brecheen can gain invaluable experience working with Oklahoma’s finest curators. The two students will take away a skillset that will prepare them for success in the future. “Casting, molding and micro picking are just some of the most important elements of paleontological work. Tyler and Danielle will have first hand experience with these skills, as well as many others,” noted Rich Cifelli, curator of vertebrate paleontology.

Each student who receives the award is encouraged to continue his or her studies in paleontology. This is becoming a reality for Hunt and Brecheen, who both plan on a future in the field.

Historical Heroes: *Saving the Spiro Lace*

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS

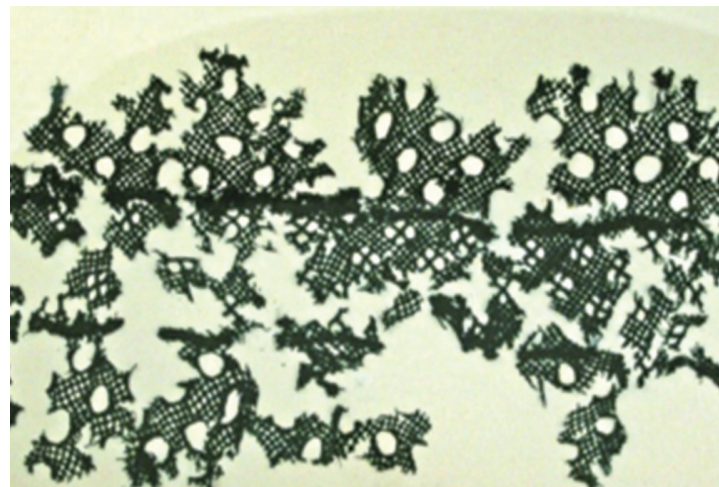
Although there exists a widespread knowledge of relic preservation among the museum community, many museums lack the resources and funding needed to administer optimal preservation care to their most prized artifacts. As a result, museums must frequently call recognition to their preservation efforts in hopes of gaining access to the necessary resources. The Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History is no exception. According to Lindsay Palaima, the former museum registrar, museums often cannot show their most valued items, as they are too fragile.

"It's so hard working in museums because you show only 3 to 5 percent of what you have," Palaima said.

The largest obstacle in artifact preservation is a lack of public awareness. To overcome this obstacle, several organizations have founded programs dedicated to enlightening museum-goers of preservation needs. One such example is the Oklahoma Cultural Heritage Trust, a two-year initiative funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Service that strives to generate widespread awareness about the preservation needs of Oklahoma artifacts.

The Oklahoma Cultural Heritage Trust established the Top 10 Most Endangered Artifacts Campaign as a means of gaining awareness for Oklahoma relics in dire need of assistance. Museums, libraries and archives from across the state submitted their artifacts for selection, and 25 diverse objects were selected as final contestants. Between May 1 and June 1, the public voted for their 10 favorite artifacts, which went on to receive vast media attention and widespread awareness.

On May 1, the Oklahoma Cultural Heritage Trust announced the Sam Noble Museum as a final



Above: Spiro Lace c. 1400 AD

MEMBER'S
HOLIDAY SALE

NOVEMBER 30

10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Members receive **30% OFF** all Excavations museum store merchandise



Above: Spiro Mounds in eastern Oklahoma

contestant at a ceremony held at the Oklahoma State Capitol building. The museum received the Cultural Heritage Stewardship Award for its campaign progress up to that point, but the Sam Noble Museum continued to fight diligently for a spot in the top 10 in order to gain recognition of preservation needs for Oklahoma's oldest textile.

The Spiro lace, from 1400 AD, was discovered by a University of Oklahoma excavation team operating under the Works Progress Administration in the late 1930s buried beneath Craig's Mound at the historic Native American Spiro Mound location in eastern Oklahoma. The Spiro Mounds are known as one of the most significant ceremonial sites in North America and were actively used from 800 to 1450 AD.

Since then, many cultural artifacts have been recovered from beneath the mounds, including cups, pottery, tools and textiles like the Spiro lace. The lace survived in part because of its proximity to copper plates beneath the mound, whose metallic properties served as a preservation tool for hundreds of years.

"It looks like they [Oklahoma Native Americans] had many clothing [items] and elaborate costumes we know nothing about," said Elsbeth Dowd, Ph.D., the current registrar of the Sam Noble Museum.

According to Dowd, this fragment of lace survives as Oklahoma's oldest textile and offers previously unknown information about the way Native Americans lived in our state centuries ago. Unfortunately, when this piece was discovered many decades ago, as a good-intentioned effort to prevent further deterioration and tearing, the lace was glued to a yellow mat board.

Current preservation efforts are geared at safely removing the lace from the mat board, as the acidic properties of the board will gradually wear on the lace and inflict further damage. Additionally, with the lace removed, archaeologists like Dowd would be able to conduct a more informative analysis of the lace using such methods as fiber analysis and 3D scanning.

"Being able to conserve this to give people access to the lace would really be great for research," confirms Dowd.

Unfortunately, few Oklahomans know about the Spiro lace and the crippling future it faces without the proper funding for preservation. Palaima, Dowd and Marc Levine, the museum's archaeology curator, are working as Spiro lace advocates to save Oklahoma history through the Top 10 Most Endangered Artifacts Campaign.



HOLIDAY 2013
HAPPENING

DECEMBER 5

5 to 8 p.m.

JOIN US for complimentary admission, festive entertainment, family-friendly crafts, discounts in Excavations and photos with Santa Claus!

www.SamNobleMuseum.org



Sam Noble Museum

The University of Oklahoma
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