

## IN THIS ISSUE

The CBBS team is closing out 2025 with a bit of wonder at all we've accomplished and the possibilities that await us in the coming year. None of this is possible without the assistance of partners like you. We're grateful for your continuing support of our mission.

- Ancient DNA researcher Dr. Meradeth Snow inspired us at our annual conference in November.
- This summer's field work brought exciting new discoveries at one site and an unexpected new direction at another.
- We've tripled our workspace with this year's renovations, opening up new learning opportunities for our students.
- A leadership transition is positioning CBBS for growth.



UNEARTHING OUR SHARED PAST

## Ancient DNA Takes the Spotlight at 31st Annual Conference



*Conference banquet speaker Dr. Meradeth Snow, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Montana*

Our 31st annual Center for Big Bend Studies Conference (November 7–8) was a great success. Dozens of presenters with expertise on many facets of the Big Bend region inspired and informed us, sparking lively discussions throughout the weekend. Friday's sessions were capped off by an evening reception at the Emmett and Miriam McCoy Cultural Events Center at the Museum of the Big Bend. Another full day of presentations filled the Saturday schedule, followed by a closing banquet featuring Dr. Meradeth Snow's keynote address.

An associate professor of Anthropology at the University of Montana, Dr. Snow studies anthropological genetics with a specialty in ancient DNA, primarily in the southwest U.S. desert and northwest Mexico. She seeks to use her DNA research to uncover connections between former residents of the Big Bend region and their counterparts at Paquimé (Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico). Paquimé, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the largest archaeological zone representing the ancient people and culture of the Chihuahuan Desert.



## Summer Fieldwork Reveals New Discoveries and Directions



While we can count on two constants — heat and camaraderie — every summer, our fieldwork is always full of surprises.

That’s likely a major incentive for our faculty, students and partners to face those daunting conditions year after blazing year.

The summer of 2025 was no exception and even included some epic West Texas thunderstorms for the team at the Genevieve Lykes Duncan site. Our successful 2024 summer excavations at GLD inspired anticipation about what this year’s work might reveal. Archaeology can be a fickle mistress, however, and this year she threw us a bit of a curveball.

Our CBBS/University of Kansas team excavated 15 one-square-meter units extending off last year’s excavations but found that ancient waterways may have washed away any evidence of the Clovis-aged occupation that we had hoped to find. Instead, the site appears to extend to the north.

“Looks like there’s some major earthwork in our future,”

says project archaeologist Erika Blecha, who notes there are questions swirling around the site that the team seeks to answer. “How much of the site is preserved? What were they doing in this location? Hunting? Processing game? Camping? A little bit of all of it?”

Next year the team will focus on a site to the south and north of the major block excavation. That “major earthwork” removes the uppermost layers of dirt (with more recent history) with heavy machinery to expedite the search for the rest of this important site below.

Our luck was better at the San Esteban Rockshelter, filled with more exciting discoveries and a great student crew. Deep in the shelter, we discovered another locality where people were burning fires, and we’re excited to learn how long this activity occurred.

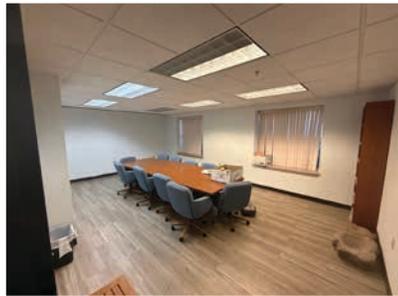
We extended our excavation efforts in the Sandal Shaft — an area in the very back, hidden by fallen boulders — and located more perishable weaponry and hearth features.

“We found hunting technologies that are much younger than last year’s hunting kit,” Senior Research Scientist Dr. Bryon Schroeder says. “It seems pretty odd that we are only finding hunting-related items at the back of the shelter.”

Results from testing to determine the age of these artifacts and features will be available soon. 📍



“The renovation allows us to be better educators and scientists.”



# Leadership Transition Positions CBBS for Growth

Sul Ross has announced a leadership transition at CBBS designed to strengthen operations and expand research capacity.

Bill Adams, Associate Director of Operations at the Borderlands Research Institute (BRI), has been named Interim Director of CBBS. Dr. Bryon Schroeder, who has served as CBBS Director since 2020, will continue with the Center as Senior Research Scientist. A national search for a permanent director is underway.

Adams joined BRI in 2023 and helps guide the institute’s strategic planning, staff development and research coordination.

“I’m honored to support the exceptional team at CBBS and ensure that their important work continues to thrive,” said Adams.

Dr. Schroeder expressed optimism about the Center’s direction and enthusiasm for his continued role in advancing its research mission.

“Stepping away from administrative duties will allow me to focus more deeply on research and fieldwork, which is where my passion lies,” Dr. Schroeder said. “I look forward to continue uncovering and sharing the remarkable history of this region with my colleagues.”

## Check Out Our New Digs

Extensions and renovations to our area in Ferguson Hall are nearly complete and will triple our current space, enhancing our work at CBBS in so many ways.

“We previously lacked the space for students to engage with cultural materials or collections meaningfully,” Senior Research Scientist Dr. Bryon Schroeder says. “The renovation allows us to be better educators and scientists.”

The transformation of the basement is finished except for the installation of new countertops and furniture. With four feet of dirt excavated in some places, it did seem like a regular “dig” in some ways.

Upstairs, the CBBS office has been extended to include a new classroom outfitted with the latest technology for remote teaching and learning and cases to display regional artifacts. All spaces (including the library) are getting new furniture to create more spaces for student learning and research. 📍



Student Bailey Larremore checks out the new Spirit Eye Cave mural.



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## New Sul Ross Anthropology Bachelor's Degree Nears Finalization

The ongoing creation of a new bachelor's degree in Anthropology is making good progress and recently passed formal review at the Texas Coordinating Board of Higher Education. There's only one more major hurdle on the path to the finalization of the degree program: approval by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. This new degree joins other CBBS-related opportunities at Sul Ross State University, including the establishment of a minor in Anthropology and a Master of Arts degree in Anthropology.

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