

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

With so much clamoring for our attention, we sometimes forget to take a moment to enjoy the real meaning of our work, unearthing our shared past. Thanks to all of you who remind us of that on every step of the journey, not just when we “go viral.”

- We enjoyed the expanded interest in our work in March. Outlets by the dozens ran web stories, social media posts, podcasts and more, first for a mammoth tusk discovery and recovery, then for our San Esteban Rockshelter hunting finds.
- In case you missed it, we’ve included those stories in this issue.
- There’s so much ahead in 2025: summer field work (with a new field school by Dr. Devin Pettigrew), our annual conference and a new bachelor’s program in Anthropology.



Dr. Bryon Schroeder  
CBBS Director



CENTER FOR  
BIG BEND STUDIES

UNEARTHING OUR SHARED PAST

## CBBS Stories Spark Wide Audience Interest in Flurry of Coverage



Team members wrap the tusk with strips that will harden into a cast to protect it during transport. Credit: Devin Pettigrew/CBBS

To our delight, two March stories about Center for Big Bend Studies discoveries traveled far and wide.

On March 11, we released the news of a rare mammoth tusk on an area ranch. Several dozen online articles, a large handful of interviews and countless social media posts: Smithsonian magazine, USA Today, Texas Standard podcast, every major city — who knew that “rare mammoth tusk” was so alluring? (In the interim, we unearthed another mammoth tusk fragment found in a creek channel on Dixon Water Foundation’s Mimms Unit.)

“Secrets of an ancient hunt” also proved irresistible after *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine released online their March feature about CBBS discoveries in the San Esteban Rockshelter. Director Bryon Schroeder gave the New York Times an interview, and another to [livescience.com](https://www.livescience.com). 📌



IN CASE YOU  
MISSED IT:

Catch up  
on the  
original  
mammoth  
tusk story  
below  
and the  
hunting  
kit story at  
right.

Credit: Justin Garnett/CBBS

# Rare Mammoth Tusk Unearthed

Although he was searching for deer, a hunter at the O2 Ranch (a private ranch in Brewster and Presidio counties) found something very different and a little puzzling in a dry creekbed.

Could it be a mammoth tusk? In West Texas?

"I was skeptical when a deer hunter showed me a picture of what he thought was a fossil," says O2 Ranch Manager Will Juett. "I figured it was likely just an old stump, but imagined how great it would be if he was right."

Juett says his great working relationship with the CBBS spurred him to immediately reach out to Dr. Bryon Schroeder and Erika Blecha. The researchers contacted graduate student Haley Bjorklund from the University of Kansas and Odyssey Archaeological Research Fund, a CBBS collaborator specializing in environmental archaeology who is interested in studying ancient animals like the mammoth. All three, plus Dr. Justin Garnett and Dr. Devin Pettigrew, met up at the ranch as soon as possible to explore the discovery further.

"It paid off big time," Juett says of their visit. "When they confirmed what they had uncovered, I couldn't believe it."

Schroeder says the researchers quickly verified that it was indeed a mammoth tusk, a very rare find in West Texas.

"We realized pretty quickly there was not more to the skeleton," Schroeder says. "It was just an isolated tusk that had been separated from the rest of the remains."

The researchers then spent two days plaster-jacketing the tusk — covering it in strips of plaster-covered burlap for protection — and building a frame to transfer it to Sul Ross State University for further study.

"A local [who subsequently wrote his PhD dissertation on it] found one in Fort Stockton in the 1960s," Schroeder says, noting that it's the only mammoth tusk in the Trans-Pecos that was carbon dated, a process that began in the 1950s. "There was a big range of error back then. Now we can get it down to a narrower range, within 500 years."

While researchers study the new find with newer technologies, the discovery sparks our imaginations.

"Seeing that mammoth tusk just brings the ancient world to life," Juett says of the find that created a buzz of excitement for everyone involved. "Now, I can't help but imagine that huge animal wandering around the hills on the O2 Ranch. My next thought is always about the people that faced those huge tusks with only a stone tool in their hand!" 🦏

# Rockshelter Worksite Offers Pristine Hide and Full Weapon System



Some components of the hunting kit. Credit: Bobby Greeson/CBBS

Recent discoveries at a pristinely preserved worksite at the San Esteban Rockshelter include potentially the oldest example of a full weapon system in North America.

Deep inside that cave, a hunter left behind items of everyday life that waited thousands of years for archaeologists to discover.

“A person came to the back of the cave and went through their hunting gear piece by piece: ‘This is good. This is not good. I need to remake this leather pouch a little bit.’ And then they went on their way,” Director Bryon Schoeder says. “But that one small act is going to have profound implications in understanding the environment.”

It’s a monumental find.

“We can use the wood to reconstruct the environment and learn more about the amount of time they spent working on tools,” he says. “We get these incredible snapshots of life, vignettes of how they lived, what the environment was and how they responded to it.”

Tools that comprise the hunting kit include six stone-tipped dart foreshafts, four self-tipped hardwood dart foreshafts, four dart nock-ends (that fit against the atlatl), a broken hunting boomerang and a partial atlatl.

Besides the weapon components, archaeologists found a folded pronghorn hide. That tanned hide, with hair still intact, stopped Schroeder in his tracks. The hide’s perimeter had spaced holes to tie to a frame, as Plains groups often used.

“We just sat there and stared at it in wonder,” he said. “That’s a moment in time. It’s akin to holding dish gloves that somebody put over the sink after doing the dishes. Somebody folded that hide up and sat that right on top of this rock. And nobody touched it for 6,000 years.” 📌



ON THE HORIZON:

## Fall conference, new bachelor’s program

The 31st Center for Big Bend Studies Conference is Nov. 7–8, 2025. Send abstracts/ titles for presentation slots with a short bio to [cbseditor@sulross.edu](mailto:cbseditor@sulross.edu) by Oct. 1, 2025.

A new Sul Ross bachelor’s program in Anthropology may be coming soon, now that we’ve submitted an official request to the Texas State University Education Board.

Credit: Erika Blecha/CBBS



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## Dreaming of Summers in the Field

*Every summer, CBBS takes learning out of the classroom and into action at desert sites. It's hard and hot, but it's also rewarding for many reasons beyond the six credits.*

Summer fieldwork with the University of Kansas: June 9–18 and June 23–July 2 at Genevieve Lykes Duncan site and July 7–18 at San Esteban Rockshelter.

Sul Ross Archaeological Field School at Pala Vieja (consecutive, with four-day breaks): May 27–June 5, June 10–19 and June 25–July 4. To apply, contact Dr. Devin Pettigrew:

[Devin.Pettigrew@sulross.edu](mailto:Devin.Pettigrew@sulross.edu)

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