



# The Ol' Pioneer

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# Public Engagement and Collaborative Archaeology at Apex, Arizona

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From 1901 to 1968, the Grand Canyon Railway carried tourists, goods, and resources along the 64 miles of track between Williams, Arizona and the Grand Canyon. One of the main functions of the railroad was to supply ranching, mining, and logging camps and move the extracted resources to larger towns for use or sale. To that end, the Saginaw and Manistee Lumber Company established a headquarters at Apex, Arizona, 52 miles from Williams along the Grand Canyon Railway and in the middle of Arizona's largest ponderosa pine forests, to harvest the trees for railroad ties, mining timbers, building materials, and other wood goods. In operation from 1928 to 1936, Apex was host to a railroad siding, logging spurs, maintenance buildings, homes, and a schoolhouse. An upcoming archaeological collaboration between the Kaibab National Forest and Northern Arizona University will examine the building platforms, domestic trash scatters, railroad beds, and privies still at the site that reveal evidence of the Scandinavian logging employees and Native American and Mexican railroad workers, providing important and largely unaddressed evidence of life in northern Arizona during the Great Depression. Most importantly, though, the project will create opportunities for public engagement, site tours, and education.

## APEX, ARIZONA

Logging camps popped up around the American West to supply towns, mines, and railroads with the timber and charcoal necessary for construction and power. Fortunately, the Grand Canyon Railway sat in the

middle of one of the largest stands of ponderosa pine in the state of Arizona (Richmond 2017:79). Over 770 miles of rail were constructed between 1887 and 1966 to harvest these rich resources (Stein 2006:1). As the heart of the forest, Williams became a center for logging operations in 1893, when the Saginaw Lumber Company purchased the timber rights to what is now much of the Kaibab National Forest and built a mill there (Richmond 2017:79). The demand for wood from businesses, ranchers, residents, mines, and the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad led to immediate success. Looking to expand, the Saginaw company partnered with the Manistee Lumber Company in 1899 and established the Saginaw and Manistee Lumber Company of Arizona (Richmond 1988:75, 2017:80).

By the 1920s, the Saginaw and Manistee Lumber Company had finished their leases south of Williams on the Kaibab National Forest and near Bellemont on the Coconino National Forest (Richmond 2017:81; Stein 2006:106). They needed new places to cut. In 1928, the Tusayan National Forest, which was renamed the Kaibab National Forest in the 1930s, managed land adjacent to the southern boundary of the Grand Canyon National Park, and the logging company contracted with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway to provide timber for the railway in exchange for a spur and sidings at Apex. As a result, the timber industry became a large employer in the region. The 1930 census recorded 415 men and 18 women in the "lumber and furniture industries" in Coconino County and 382 men and 2 women working for the "Steam and street railroads" out of the 4,477 men and 2,575 gainfully employed adults (Lamont and Steuart 1931:20).

Located at milepost 52 of the Grand Canyon Railway, Apex was

originally built as a passing track in 1901 (Richmond 1990:52, 53, 2017:36-37). The name Apex likely came from the site's location at the top of the longest and steepest grade of the railroad (Richmond 1988:75). In 1928, the Saginaw and Manistee Lumber Company selected the location for their company operations (Crump 1993:60-61; Richmond 1988:76, 2017:36-37). The Santa Fe constructed a section house, a 31-car siding, an 85-car wye, and a spur to the logging camp on behalf of the lumber company. The spur extended 26 miles east to the edge of Grand Canyon National Park, but the community of loggers, their families, and related employees lived and worked at the main camp of Apex (Richmond 2017:83). The Saginaw and Manistee also had three of their own engines and their own engineers (Richmond 2017:87-88). The camp's many uses made Apex a regular stop. The amenities allowed the loggers to work year-round (Richmond 1988:81-82) and allowed the company to produce nearly five million ties a year for the railroad, timbers for the numerous mines in the Francis District, like those at Anita, and building materials for the construction boom at the Grand Canyon. It is estimated that the company logged nearly 108,000 acres east of Apex (Stein 2006:3, 87). Interestingly, the loggers started with the areas furthest east from the camp and moved west towards Apex and Tusayan (Stein 2006:3, 70, 106).

Both based out of Michigan, the Saginaw Lumber Company and the Manistee Lumber Company brought with them many of the Swedish and Swedish-American residents who had made the Midwest their home. Over time, Norwegian and Finnish workers joined their ranks, making Apex a largely Scandinavian logging camp (Richmond 1988:80, 2017:86). In the 1940s and 1950s, William M. Cady

similarly relocated nearly 500 African American timber workers from his Louisiana operation to McNary, Arizona in the White Mountains (Hangan 2020:152, 154). Skilled lumber workers were valuable, and many companies preferred to hire known workers when moving operations to new locations.

Several Mexican workers were also employed at the Apex siding by the Santa Fe. On July 3, 1909, the *Williams News* reported an accident from June 29, where three Mexican men belonging to the same section crew were injured while blasting rocks with dynamite along the grade near Apex (Richmond 2017:42-43). One stick did not explode, so the three men went to investigate when the explosion occurred. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe transported the men to Albuquerque, where one of the men died. The newspaper did not record their names. The Saginaw and Manistee Lumber Company also employed Mexican workers, but solely at their mill and box plant in Williams.

Based on interviews with previous residents, Al Richmond notes that there were seven houses on the east side of the rail line and seven more houses and the school on the west side (Richmond 1988:78, 84). Two oil tanks, a water tank, sheds, and maintenance buildings served the locomotives. As timber is a non-renewable resource, especially in the timeframe necessary for the Saginaw and Manistee Lumber Company to remain profitable, Apex was built to be movable (Crump 1993:61; Richmond 2017:83). The railroad bed and tracks on the Apex spur were deemed temporary as well (Richmond 2017:86). Little effort was spent making the main line, which was more of a dirt track road where ties sank into the ground, efficient. Housing for single male employees consisted of reused boxcars, which could be placed on flatcars and moved to the next location off the railroad (Richmond 2017:83). Family housing was slightly more permanent, with a kitchen, a living room, and one bedroom. Arvid

Anderson, the superintendent, had the largest house which boasted two bedrooms. Still, family housing was portable; they sat on temporary wood or stone foundations and, with their unique "L" or "T"-shaped design, could come apart in the middle and be placed on flatbeds as well. When the workers were in Apex, a commissary car, kitchen and dining car, and the supervisor's car were parked in town (Richmond 1988:78).

Beyond the basic necessities for camp workers, Apex also had some amenities for the town's families. In 1929, Apex School District Number 3 opened its doors to the few children who lived at the camp (Crump 1993:61; Richmond 1988:80, 2017:84). Similarly built out of reused boxcars on a timber foundation, the one-room school operated until 1936. Three women, Margaret Longley, Katherine Sipp, and Rose Wilson, served as schoolteachers over those seven years, overseeing no more than 15 students over eight grades for \$130 plus board. Interestingly, despite the racial tensions in Arizona and the United States at that time, Apex's and Anita's schools were unsegregated. The Scandinavian children that made up the majority of the town's youths attended schools with both Mexican and Native American students whose parents worked for the railroad. Meanwhile, only fifty miles away, Williams' schools were segregated.

Apex was also home to a company store, which sold tobacco, canned goods, soap, and other domestic goods (Richmond 1988:78-79, 2017:91). Wages were livable, especially for the Depression, yet, like all company stores, prices were higher. Unfortunately, the store was the closest location to purchase groceries or merchandise. The store was resupplied by truck from the company commissary in Williams, meaning, on special occasions, employees could drive the road to Williams or the Grand Canyon to purchase goods.

The Santa Fe abolished the Apex section on June 1, 1930, retired the wye and interchange track and

removed the rails, switches, and ties in 1942, and closed the siding in 1954 (Richmond 2017:37). The Saginaw and Manistee finished their lease in June 1936 (Richmond 1988:87, 2017:93). The school was one of the last buildings to be moved, holding its final classes through spring 1936. Then, the loggers and their families moved on to the next timber lease while the maintenance crews, section crews, and other railway employees stayed behind to dismantle the camp and spur. In 2001, milepost 52 was renamed Imbleau after roadmaster Sam Imbleau who died that year (Richmond 2017:185). Despite the deconstruction of the camp, the eight years of occupation left behind numerous traces of the lives of those who lived and worked there.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY AT APEX

As the structures at the site were removed when the Saginaw and Manistee relocated to their new timber leases, only building platforms, portions of the railroad grade, and the numerous trash scatters accumulated over the eight years of occupation at the site remain. Unfortunately, even these archaeological resources have been threatened. Modern Forest Service roads crisscross the area, often on top of or following the old railroad beds. The lack of intact bottles in the trash scatters indicate that the site has been looted since the residents left. Cone-top beer cans from the 1950s and 1960s expose the presence of more recent visitors to the site.

Despite this, the site can still reveal important information about the lives of the timber and railroad laborers and their families. Previous Kaibab National Forest surveys (USFS 2006:4-5) of the site identified several domestic trash scatters, with glass shards, buckets, shoe soles, tin cans, and ceramic sherds, indicating the past locations of houses. Other features, such as brick piles with machine parts, suggest the sites of logging- or railroad-related maintenance buildings. The survey also identified the location of the Apex schoolhouse and its associated wood foundation,



metal scraps, tin cans, two limestone rubble piles, and a possible privy (USFS 2006:6).

Beginning in summer 2022, Dr. Emily Dale, a Lecturer and historical archaeologist in Northern Arizona University's Department of Anthropology, will direct the inaugural season of an archaeological field school at Apex in collaboration with the Kaibab National Forest. Running from May 30 to June 24, the field school aims to record, map, and photograph previously unidentified archaeological features at Apex. Al Richmond and Don Bufkin conducted on-site interviews with former residents of the town to draw a map of building locations, and Kaibab National Forest archaeologists located remnants of several structures that coincide with Bufkin's map (see Richmond 2017:80). The locations of several buildings are still unmapped, however. For example, while we know Apex had a kitchen and a company store, neither of their exact locations have been identified. We will also identify diagnostic artifacts in the camp's numerous can and trash dumps.

The purpose of the archaeological research is to address questions about the everyday lives of the residents of Apex through analysis of the artifacts and landscape. What was life like in a Depression-era, rural Arizona labor town? What were the differences between single male laborers' lives and those with families? Between supervisors and their employees? Between the Scandinavian Saginaw and Manistee workers and the Native American and Mexican AT&SF workers? Beyond the schoolhouse, where else is there evidence of children?

As we envision the project to last several years and explore the camp itself, the logging spurs, and the Apex siding, our questions can change as we encounter new archaeological and historical information. Our project will also evolve as we recruit new graduate students with their own research interests.

Preliminary surveys of Apex in preparation for the Summer 2022 field school have already revealed inter-

esting information about the camp's residents. For example, while the site coincided with the 1920 to 1933 Prohibition era, there is ample evidence of alcohol consumption. Some can be explained by the three years between the repeal of Prohibition and the abandonment of the site. On the other hand, there is clear evidence that the residents potentially made their own beer in defiance of Prohibition laws. Several can lids for "Hop Flavored Budweiser Barley Malt Syrup" have been found at the site. Budweiser produced the extract during Prohibition, as the sale of alcohol was prohibited, but the sale of ingredients was still legal (Klein 2019). Budweiser advertised the malt syrup as an ingredient for bread and cookies. Yet, the product was easily combined with yeast to brew beer at home, a fact Budweiser, and other breweries that made similar extracts, knew all too well. One Prohibition-era Budweiser advertisement for their barley malt syrup displayed a clerk winking knowingly.

The artifacts also reveal the local and farther-reaching connections of the site. Two bottle bases are embossed "Flagstaff / Arizona", one likely a Coca-Cola bottle from the Brooks Bottling Company (below). Numerous bricks from The Denver HiFire Fire Clay Company in Colorado demonstrate ties from throughout the larger Southwest and American West. Perhaps travelling the furthest, one trash scatter held several pieces of a ceramic plate that was "Made in Japan."



Broken bottle base embossed "FLAGSTAFF / BROOKS / ARIZ." Photo by Emily Dale.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

Archaeology can meaningfully contribute to knowledge about Arizona's history. It is clear that Arizonans are well-versed in the importance of preserving the state's prehistoric heritage and interested in the area's history. What is less clear is if those intersect and convey the meaningful contributions historical archaeology can make in the understanding of the more recent past. A logging camp is just as much an archaeological site as a pueblo. Tin cans and bottles are just as much archaeological artifacts as projectile points.

A key component of the collaboration, therefore, is public outreach. Thanks to funding from the Kaibab National Forest and a grant from Arizona Humanities, the field school will have a temporary Welcome Center, complete with educational brochures, guided tours, and port-a-potties. We will also coordinate and advertise planned tours with numerous organizations, including the Grand Canyon Historical Society. Expected tour guides include the authors, Kaibab National Forest archaeologists, and NAU anthropology students. Al Richmond, author of *The Story of the Grand Canyon Railway: Cowboys, Miners, Presidents, and Kings*, has also expressed interest in further visits to the site and sharing his expertise with the public.

The public outreach project will inform about Apex itself and the larger contexts of the Grand Canyon Railway and the area's logging industry. Moreover, it will also educate visitors on historical archaeology as a subfield of archaeology and the damages caused by bottle collecting and other types of looting at more recent archaeological sites. The loss of information caused by pot hunters at prehistoric sites are the same kinds of impacts at historic sites.

In combining the archaeological field school with public outreach, the Apex project will further instill the importance of public communication and collaboration with the public into the next generation. Alongside learning archaeological skills like survey





Al Richmond educates several members of the Apex project, including the authors, at a trash scatter in September 2021. Photo by Emily Dale.

and excavation, the field school students will staff the welcome table, give tours, and talk to the public in a variety of ways. A new generation of archaeologists aware of the benefits of public engagement will be born.

### CONCLUSION

The Apex archaeology project is three years old, with the field school originally scheduled for Summer 2020. The past two years have obviously been cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This delay, though, has given us time to prepare for meaningful archaeological research and public outreach. Our presentation for the Grand Canyon Historical Society (Dale and Hangan 2021) and this article in the *Ol' Pioneer* are just the first steps in building an archaeological project that contributes to public interest in Arizona's more recent history. We have two public tours organized through the Arizona Preservation Foundation for our summer session on June 11 and June 21 starting at 10am. Groups are also invited to arrange their own site visits and work with us to schedule a date between May 30 and June 24. You can sign up for these tours by e-mailing Emily Dale ([emily.dale@nau.edu](mailto:emily.dale@nau.edu)) with your name(s) and contact

information. You are also invited to stop by unannounced at our welcome table for tours!

The project is planned for multiple years, meaning our public engagement goals are a continuous work in progress. Please feel free to contact us for any questions, keep an eye out for further announcements, and check out our website (<https://nau.edu/anthropology/apex-arizona-archaeology-project/>) for more information. We look forward to having all of you visit Apex!

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