

Sul Ross students excavate lessons from wolf den

Three students at Sul Ross State University learned a different twist to being a "Lobo" this summer when they spent four weeks at the "Wolf Den."

Ashley Baker, Alpine; Jesse Nowak, Granbury; and Dawnella Petrey, Miles, enrolled in the summer session of Archaeology Field School, at Sul Ross. The field school is a field training class held every other year for aspiring archaeologists and anthropologists. Their class project this term was working with The Center for Big Bend Studies at Wolf Den Cave, a remote archeological site high in the Davis Mountains.

Bob Mallouf, director of the Center for Big Bend Studies, led a crew of 16 professional archaeologists and volunteers, including the students and their instructor, Andy Cloud, as they spent eight hours a day, five days a week, meticulously uncovering and documenting three areas of the cave floors inside the Wolf Den rock shelters.

Baker, Nowak and Petrey were assigned to work under the oversight of the scientists and to excavate and document their excavation as a part of the overall study. All three students had been bitten by the desire to be archaeologists long before their summer work at Wolf Den.

"I've wanted to do this work for a long time," said Baker, who is studying geology at Sul Ross. "ever since I went with my father,s classes to see the petroglyphs throughout the area." Baker,s father is Sul Ross art professor Bob Hext, who teaches a popular Rock Art class at the university.

"It's so special to have the opportunity to do this work at this time and place," she added.

Petrey, who was already familiar with the Big Bend region from past travels, came to the field school to continue her graduate studies. Nowak is currently an undergraduate at Texas Tech in Lubbock. Last summer he worked at Mayan sites in Belize, but he admitted it did not compare to the work he accomplished this summer.

Half-meter deep, square-shaped excavations in the cave floor were used to study remains left by the ancient peoples who occupied the caves. The crew measured, photographed and hand-graphed profiles of each excavation unit and collected recovered artifacts, many seeds and small animal bones, for future study.

By uncovering and analyzing layers of debris embedded within the of dust and ash layers of the floor, the archaeologists sought

possible answers to the questions of who these people were, how and why they lived in the caves, and what their purpose was there.

The site shows evidence of occupation by people on and off dating back to 2500 B.C. with the most recent occupation in the sometime between 700 to 1300 A.D. by the "Livermore Phase People" who lived in the Davis Mountains at that time. Wolf Den is one of several long-term research projects involving the Livermore People being studied by Mallouf and the Center for Big Bend Studies. Mallouf speculates the site in the cave to be primarily a ritualistic site rather than a habitation site, due to the proximity of Mount Livermore, the kinds of fire pits, the type of debris being found near the fire pits and other features.

"We're trying to get into their minds, which can be difficult, especially when it comes to the ritualistic or spiritual lives of pre-historic people," Mallouf said. "We don't know exactly what they believed, but we can get clues by studying what was important to them."

This is the second expedition to the Wolf Den, the first occurred in the summer of 2001. The site is on the Nature Conservancy Davis Mountain Preserve and requires their per-

mission to access. A long four-wheel vehicle drive and a steep hike are done to reach the remote location. The three field school students undertook the adventure in stride, the first week being the most grueling.

"Getting back and forth to the site every day has built a lot of camaraderie amongst us," said Petrey. "We've gotten to where we sing songs as a distraction on the hike. We've bonded, and for all of us, this has been an once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Usually the field school is held

in a different location in order for the students to focus on an introduction to field work, but for this project Mallouf and Cloud agreed to include three exceptional students in the professional group. It was a great opportunity for the students to work alongside professional archaeologists on an actual site.

"The best find I've had so far was a painted stone," said Nowak, referring to an object he uncovered within the first weeks. "It was an awesome feeling to see something like that after being

buried for so long."

Working with the students, Cloud and Mallouf, kneeling for hours on the cave floor while brushing and sifting through ash and dust, were members of the Center for Big Bend Studies staff, including David Keller, Jason Bush, David Hart, John Seebach and Richard Walter, Alpine; Roger Boren and Ann Ohl, Terlingua; Melissa Williams, Marfa; Steve Kennedy, Fort Davis; and photographers Jim Bones, Alpine, and Jim Bonar, Austin.