



# 20

T W E N T Y Y E A R S

## O F S A V I N G S I T E S

### TWO DECADES AGO

a few people banded together with the idea of preserving archaeological sites. It was an idea whose time had come.

BY DAVID GRANT NOBLE

**T**he 1970s were dark years for archaeological conservation. Amidst an international bull market for Native American antiquities, a federal court overruled the 1906 Antiquities Act, the country's first federal law protecting ancient sites on public land. As a result, artifact prospecting on public lands held more promise and less risk than ever before. The Sunday afternoon pot hunter, equipped with probe stick and picnic basket, was replaced by the professional looter driving a bulldozer. In southwestern New Mexico, the Mimbres Valley saw the worst of it: whole

pueblos churned to rubble and skeletons long asleep in the earth crushed and scattered on the ground.

Other archaeological districts around the country were threatened as well, and not just by looting, but by agricultural development, mining, urban sprawl, and erosion. While

each site posed a conservation challenge for its local community, together they constituted a national problem calling for a national solution. Thus, in early 1980, The Archaeological Conservancy was founded, the first organization with the purpose of preserving America's archaeological resources for posterity.

*The view of Peck's Lake from Hatalacva Pueblo in Arizona, a Conservancy preserve.*



California inventor and businessman Jay Last launched the organization with the help of Mark Michel and Steven LeBlanc. Michel, who had been an assistant to New Mexico's governor, was named president. LeBlanc became staff archaeologist and board chairman. Michel had headed efforts by the Society for American Archaeology to get federal legislation enacted by Congress to replace the outdated and increasingly ineffective Antiquities Act. The legislation, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, is the principal law protecting archaeological sites. Other Conservancy board members included Last, who is still on the board, and several distinguished archaeologists. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation put up \$300,000 in start-up funds and the Nature Conservancy chipped in with advice and assistance.

The philosophy of the Conservancy founders was that, given American attitudes toward private property, the most effective way to save archaeological sites was to, as Michel often puts it, "do it the American way—buy them." In their first year of operation, they purchased the Hopewell Mounds Group near Chillicothe, Ohio. Thought to be the civic-ceremonial center of the Hopewellian civilization, this site complex contained large burial mounds, the most extensive earthworks in North America, and a wealth of art and artifacts.

Though the Conservancy was off to a good start, it faced several challenges. "Like any well-meaning group starting out," Michel recalls, "we were unknown, we had no track record. And archaeological conservation had no national constituency then. We had to start from scratch just to develop a mailing list. But then we had a breakthrough—Stewart Udall joined the board. His name alone boosted our credibility." Udall, a nationally known conservationist who had served as secretary of the interior under presidents Kennedy and Johnson, soon became board chairman and actively raised funds.

In its second year, the Conservancy added more ancient mound sites in Arkansas and Missouri. It acquired other sites,



*The Conservancy has acquired numerous sites in 33 states over the years. Cabe Mounds (above left) is in Texas. Mission Guevavi (above right) is in Arizona. Jay Last (right) has been a Conservancy leader since its inception.*



too. One was a major portion of San Marcos Pueblo, a large town in the Rio Grande Valley whose dates spanned the prehistoric and historic periods. (The remainder of this site was acquired in 1998). The ruins of Fort Craig, a 19th-century army frontier post in New Mexico that saw action in the Civil War, were saved, too, as were an ancient cave site in Kentucky and the remains of a Big Osage Indian village in Missouri.

The Conservancy opened a Southwest regional office in October 1981 with Jim Walker, who had a background in archaeology and business, as its director. This move greatly facilitated the process of identifying, acquiring, and conserving sites in the Southwest.

Walker focused on two more cultural areas rich in archae-

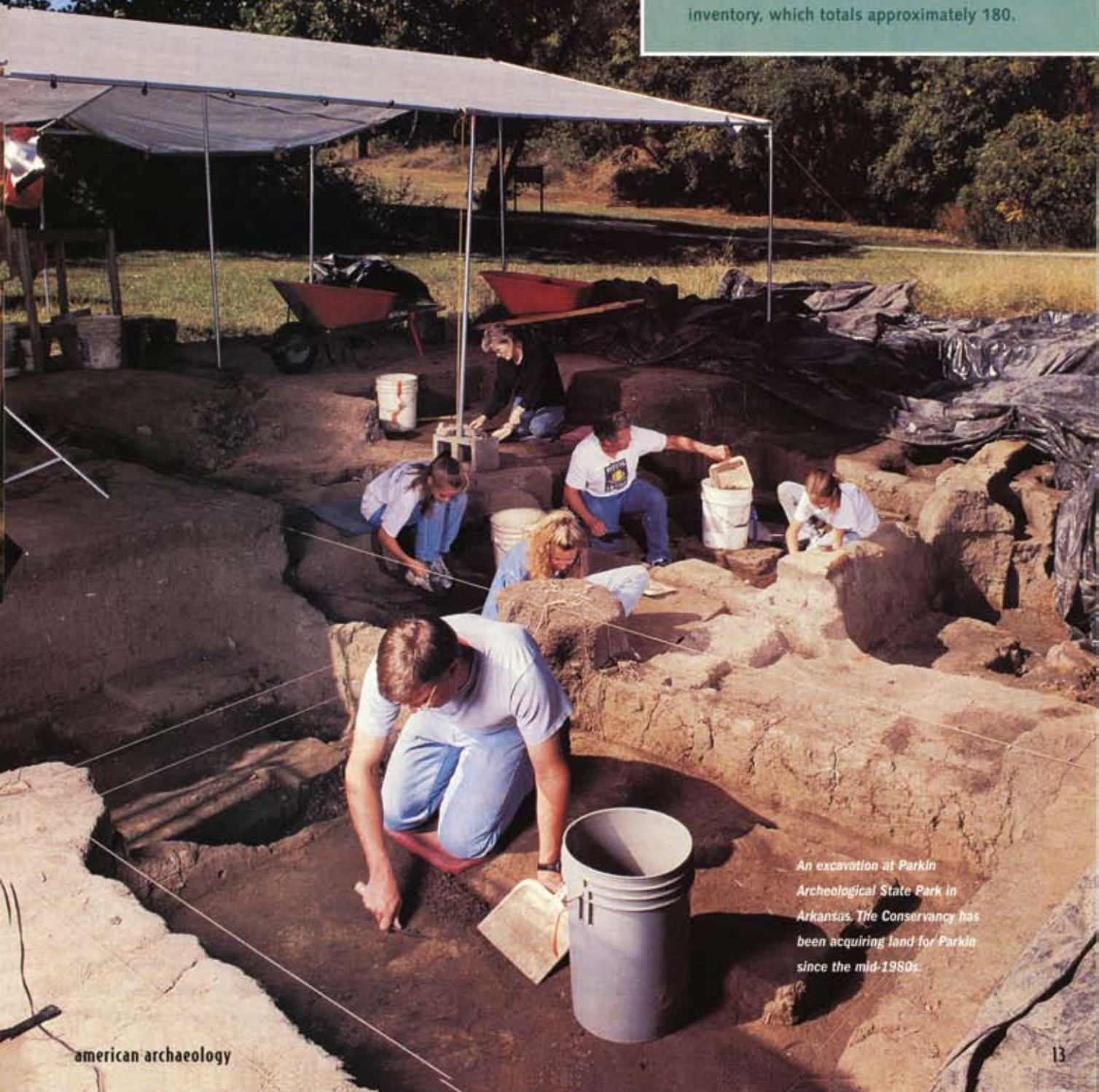
LEFT: JIM WALKER RIGHT: JERRY JACKA

MARK HARMEL

OPPOSITE PAGE: SPENCER TIREY

# 20 T W E N T Y   Y E A R S O F   S A V I N G   S I T E S

BY THE END OF THE 1980S,  
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inventory, which totals approximately 180.

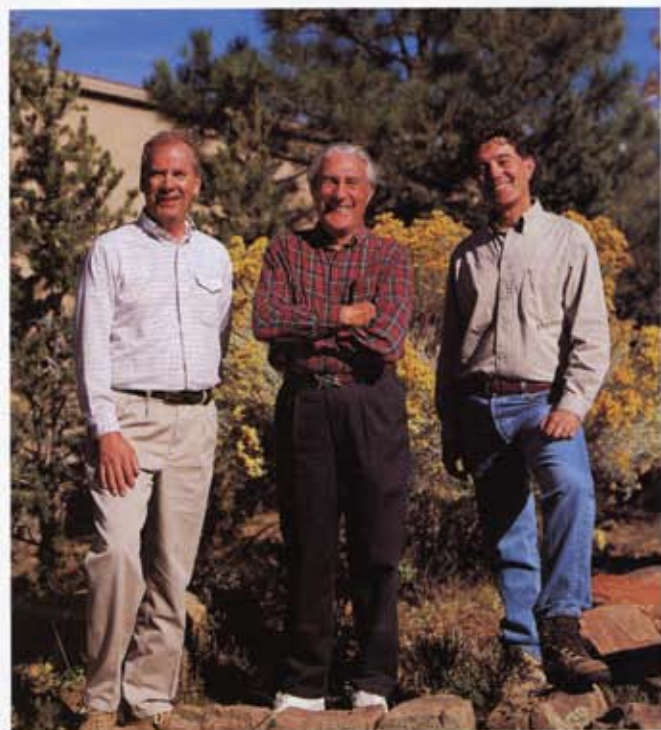


*An excavation at Parkin  
Archeological State Park in  
Arkansas. The Conservancy has  
been acquiring land for Parkin  
since the mid-1980s.*



JERRY JACKA

*The Conservancy purchased Atkeson Pueblo on Oak Creek in Arizona from the Thede family in 1989. Margaret and Jennie Thede are seen in this photo.*



*Mark Michel, Stewart Udall and Jim Walker*

ological resources. The first was the southern Sinagua region in Arizona's Verde Valley. The Sinagua Indians were a farming people who thrived between around A.D. 700 and 1425. The National Park Service had long before set aside the Verde Valley sites of Tuzigoot, Montezuma Castle, and Montezuma Well. "These sites were excavated in the 1930s," says Walker, "and what we knew about the Sinagua was locked into the technology of that period. By the 1980s, the Verde Valley had become one of the fastest-developing areas in the Southwest and we felt it was important to acquire privately-owned sites there to provide a research base for the future." The Conservancy identified four major threatened sites—Atkeson Pueblo at Oak Creek, Thoeny Pueblo, Ottens Pueblo on Sugarloaf Mountain, and Hatalacva Pueblo—and over a period of years acquired them.

Another targeted area was southwestern Colorado's Montezuma Valley, where the Mesa Verde Anasazi had built eight major towns and hundreds of smaller sites thought to

CHRISTINE PRESTON

## WORKING TO SAVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES



**1:** Rob Crisell, Eastern regional director, at the Nevers site in New Hampshire. **2:** Alan Gruber, Southeast regional director, and Earl Gadbery, chairman of the board, at Parkin Archeological State Park in Arkansas. **3:** Lynn Dunbar, Western regional director, at the Odessa site in Washington state. **4:** Paul Gardner, Midwest regional director, at the Alligator Mound in Ohio.

have been populated by as many as 30,000 people in the late 1200s. "Most of these sites were privately owned and at risk from looting, farming, and urban growth," Walker recalls. "At the same time, archaeologists were beginning to appreciate the importance of these ancient towns, recognizing that they were a major population center with enormous research potential."

While saving the Hopewell site and other ruins was a coup for archaeological conservation and brought instant visibility to the fledgling organization, the cost of these purchases seriously depleted its bank account. The Conservancy's challenge was to attract enough financial support to keep afloat while continuing to preserve threatened archaeological sites. As he monitored the Conservancy's shrinking funds, Last remembers asking, "Should we just close down and operate with volunteers out of a post office box?"

But the Conservancy, through the 1980s, was building a

20  
TWENTY YEARS  
OF SAVING SITES

national following. By the end of the decade, 8,000 people were paying membership dues and numerous corporations and foundations were helping to buy sites. The National Endowment for the Humanities provided a \$250,000 Challenge Grant, which was more than

matched by \$750,000 in new contributions.

Acquiring privately-owned sites often requires long-term planning, sensitive diplomacy, and a liberal measure of patience, all of which were employed by the Conservancy in acquiring sites in the Montezuma Valley. Initially, the Conservancy raised \$100,000 to buy Mud Springs and Yellowjacket Pueblos, two huge complexes that primarily date from between A. D. 1000 and 1300. Yellowjacket occupies more than 100 acres and is estimated to have a minimum of 42 roomblocks containing approximately 600 rooms and 193 kivas. Research at Yellowjacket continues. These two pueblos contain more rooms and kivas than all of the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde.



1



2



3



4

TWENTY YEARS  
OF SAVING SITES

These artifacts were fashioned by Hopewell craftsmen:

1. Tortoise shell trumpeter swan
2. Bird effigy pipe
3. Copper serpent
4. Mica hand



*Bell Coulee Rock Shelter, located in western Wisconsin, is a late prehistoric site of the Oneota culture. The Conservancy acquired it in 1995.*

While the Conservancy emphasized preserving groups of culturally related sites, other acquisitions in the 1980s show a broad cultural and geographical diversity. The Borax Lake Site in California, for example, is Paleo-Indian; the Davis Mounds (A. D. 1200-1400) in Oklahoma belong to the Caddo culture; and Las Huertas is an abandoned eighteenth-century Spanish village in New Mexico's Rio Grande Valley.

During the 1990s, preservation projects have multiplied. Over the years, the Conservancy has opened four more regional offices, which are strategically located to coordinate closely with archaeologists, land owners, political entities, and funding sources in each part of the country. Rob Crisell directs the Eastern region; Alan Gruber, the Southeast; Paul Gardner, the Midwest; Lynn Dunbar, the West. Twice a year, the directors meet with the board to set site acquisition priorities, plan strategies, and allocate acquisition funds. Of late, about twenty archaeological sites are being added annually to the Conservancy's inventory, which totals more than 180 in 33 states.

The Conservancy achieved a milestone in 1995 when it successfully led a campaign to raise \$225,000 to acquire the Lamb Springs site in Colorado, its 100th preservation project. Lamb Springs is a rare late-Pleistocene kill-and-processing site that includes the well-preserved bones of at least 24 mammoths and many prehistoric camels, horses, bison, and other extinct mammals. Archaeologists uncovered Cody-complex stone tools and spear points, dating to between 9,000 and 7,000 years ago, in association with the faunal remains. Research at

Lamb Spring continues and some scholars believe the site may even be proven to have a pre-Clovis component. As this site overlies an extensive gravel deposit (which already was being quarried in 1995), the Conservancy had to take quick action to save it. In partnership with the Denver Museum of Natural History and the Colorado Historical Fund, which provided a \$100,000 grant, funds were raised to purchase and preserve this important Paleo-Indian site.

The Conservancy also showed its nimbleness in saving the site of Fort Edwards in West Virginia, which was built in 1754 and stormed by a force of Indians led by French officers in the French and Indian War. In 1995, Gardner, the Midwest director, received an urgent call from a county planner who said that the fort site would be bulldozed for tract housing in 30 days unless that landowner was paid \$30,000. "It was a typical situation facing archaeological preservation today," says Gardner. "We had an important historical site—even George Washington was

**Reeves Mound, an Adena burial mound in northern Kentucky, was donated to the Conservancy in 1988.**

connected to it—that hardly anyone was familiar with. But when you told them about its significance, they were amazed and thrilled.” The Conservancy purchased the land and later transferred it to the newly formed Fort Edwards Foundation, which created a historical park complete with a reconstruction of the old fort for the public to see.

With the help of its many contacts in the professional archaeological community, the Conservancy has identified approximately a thousand sites across the country that still need to be preserved. As always, the biggest challenge to meeting such an ambitious goal is finding funds. Michel assesses the organization’s financial condition as “solid, but not rich.” The membership has reached almost 18,000, nearly doubling since publication of *American Archaeology* began three years ago. The Conservancy also educates the public about the importance of archaeological sites, supports legislation that protects them, and conducts tours to a number of them.

To achieve its mission, Michel believes the Conservancy must “stay narrowly focused.” During more than twenty years of involvement in archaeological preservation, he has noticed a greater eagerness in the national consciousness to preserve sites. “Attitudes are changing,” he says. “Take the people who dig up burials. We used to refer to them as pot hunters and give them a slap on the wrist. Now we call them looters and send them to jail. And what was done openly twenty years ago is now done covertly.”

“The Conservancy fills a very necessary role,” says Jim Judge, a professor of anthropology who has been involved with the organization since its inception and is a member of its board of directors. “It’s truly remarkable what the Conservancy has been able to do.”

These accomplishments reflect not only the efforts of the Conservancy, but also those of countless archaeologists and laypeople who have made significant contributions to the cause.

Regarding the future, Earl Gadbery, the retired head of the Alcoa Foundation and the Conservancy’s chairman of the board, sees great potential for growth and hopes membership will double in the next five years. Last also sees strength in the organization’s growing membership and he stresses the importance of “staying small, focused, and efficient.” Looking back on his two decades with the Conservancy, Last says, “It is one of the things that I’m proudest of in my life.”

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## A LIFE DEDICATED TO PRESERVATION

Stewart Udall speaks of his role in saving sites and the challenges of the future

**G**rowing up in Indian Country in St. Johns, Arizona, and later serving as a member of Congress and secretary of the interior, has given me a life-long association with Native Americans.

As a boy, I was fascinated with the nearby ruins of past civilizations such as the Anasazi. In my years in public service, while we were able to protect several of the most spectacular of these sites, I also became increasingly aware of the wholesale destruction of irreplaceable antiquities that was occurring throughout the nation.

The Archaeological Conservancy, with its focus on archaeological sites on private lands, rose to meet the challenge. We demonstrated that important archaeological sites on these lands could be saved by private action. Getting started wasn't easy, and there were times when we thought we wouldn't make it; but with lots of help from people who care about our past, we have.

But where do we go from here? The challenges of the next century are enormous. Not only are archaeological sites threatened by professional looters, but the pace of economic development has quickened as well. Urban sprawl is now as much a threat as the grave robber. We will have to work more closely with city and county planners to steer new developments away from archaeological sites. We will have to work closely with state and federal land managers to develop new strategies to preserve the ruins of whole cultures, not just individual sites. And we will have to redouble our efforts to buy and preserve privately-owned sites throughout the nation.

Our first 20 years are rich in achievement, but they have only laid a foundation for what must come in the next century if we are to preserve our past.