2020: An “atypical”, but productive, year at the VBJ

By Jacqueline Wyatt
President, Vore Buffalo Foundation

The COVID-19 pandemic made it a very atypical year at the Vore Site. My biggest disappointment was the lack of field trips. I very much enjoy sharing the glimpse that the Vore Site gives us into the past and excitement of archaeological discovery with young minds. I also missed the time with the super group of volunteers who help with the field trips. We are hard at work on a virtual field trip that can be shared via the internet. We have hired a Black Hills State University student, Anne Skaug, to help with the project.

We were able to open, albeit briefly, for the month of July and the first week of August. The board decided that we would offer tours only of the excavation building. We required that all visitors wear masks and did not charge admission so that our staff would not have to handle cash or credit cards in the tight space of the cabin. It was a busy month as the interpreters gave tours to about 2,000 people. I would like to commend our staff, Jennifer Adams, Shelby Heaster, McKenna McCreary, and Doneen Drushel for great work under adverse circumstances.

Unfortunately, we are going into the fall with the need for site maintenance. The heat/air system in the cabin gave up in late July, and the quote for a replacement system is over $3000. Lighting and a water heater in the tipi are expected to cost another $600. Please consider supporting the VBJF with a yearly membership. It is membership dollars and donations that allow us to perform necessary upkeep and that make many of our programs possible. The VBJF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. None of the board members draw a salary, so none of your dollars will go toward administrative costs.

On behalf of the board I would like to extend a special (Continued on next page)
(Continued from page 1) thanks for a lifetime membership purchased this summer in memory of Jack Strohm. We also thank Sundance State Bank for their ongoing support of the VBJF. Again this year, SSB has donated $5,000, which will be put toward the principal of the loan the board took out in 2013 to construct the tipi. The loan, which was originally for $250,000, is down to $53,616.

At our annual meeting, I will give a summary of our finances, and we will discuss how much we can afford to put toward the principal of the loan taken out in 2013 to put up the tipi. Our annual meeting is open to all foundation members. I encourage you to Zoom with us on November 21 at 2 pm Mountain Standard Time.

**Vore Collection Project Funded by a “Save America’s Treasures” Grant**

A “Save America’s Treasures” grant provided by the National Park Service, in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Endowment of the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities will fund curation and preservation of the approximately 23,000 bone and stone artifacts excavated from the Vore Site. The grant of $157,757.76 will fund 50% of the three-year program. The remaining funds will be in-cash and in-kind contributions from the Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist (OWSA), the UWAR, the UW Libraries, and the Vore Buffalo Jump Foundation (VBJF).

The Wyoming State Archaeologist Spencer Pelton noted, “The scientific relevance of the Vore site assemblage extends far beyond archaeology and may be useful for zoologists, conservation biologists, paleontologists, and even agricultural economists and geneticists interested in understanding the impacts of human predation upon bovid herd viability. Our goal is to prepare the Vore site assemblage in a way that encourages its widespread use for these sorts of cross-disciplinary research projects.”

The grant was written by Dr. Marieka Arksey, who until recently was curation manager of the University of Wyoming Archaeological Repository (UWAR). Chad Hutchens, Head of Digital Assets, University of Wyoming Libraries is one of the principal investigators on the project as a goal is to create a digital version of the collection that can be accessed by researchers world-wide. Dr. Charles Reher, Professor and Anthropology Museum Director, Emeritus, is also a principal investigator on the grant. Jacqueline Wyatt, VBJF Board president and another co-investigator, stated, “The board is thrilled that this grant has been funded. Through this grant and the Indigenous Scholars Program funded through donations to our board, the Vore collection will finally be available for cross-disciplinary studies.”

**VBJF Interns Work on Curation of the Vore Collection**

In 2019, several donations allowed the VBJF to establish the Indigenous Scholars Program. This program funds paid internships in the University of Wyoming Archeological Repository working with the Vore Buffalo Jump collection. In keeping with the mission and goals of both the OWSA and the VBJF, the Indigenous Scholars Program prioritizes selection of underserved populations and indigenous/descendant group populations.

Given the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, the internships this semester began under less-than-ideal conditions. Lab space was set up in kitchens around Laramie as the student interns were unable to work in the Archaeological Repository. Supervising the efforts this semester is Molly Heron. Molly received a B.A. in Anthropology with a minor in Museum Studies from the University of Wyoming and is now pursuing an M.A at UW. Her graduate research focuses on using microscopy to analyze perishable and organic artifacts, Paleoindian interactions with megafauna, and how proboscidean ivory was used in North America. Molly plans to pursue a Ph.D. in archaeology and hopes to become a professor or curator. She says that she is thrilled to have the opportunity to work with the Vore collection, as it will give her extensive experience with a legacy collection. She is fascinated by the indicators of active butchering on the bones – spiral fractures, sawed elements, and cutmarks. Molly is responsible for the artifacts of the week photos and write ups that are posted to the Vore Buffalo Jump Facebook page.

Undergraduate intern Jolie Magelky is not a stranger to the Vore collection. She worked on the Vore lithic collection during the summer of 2019 as an intern with the Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist, an internship funded by the VBJF. When Jolie was in high school, her family moved to Wyoming from Alaska and she became interested in archaeology. Jolie is a senior working toward majors in both anthropology and statistics. She notes, “statistics is becoming an essential way for archaeologists and anthropologists to analyze the data they collect.” Jolie applied for an internship this semester as she was intrigued by the opportunity to work on the Vore faunal collection to help make it accessible to researchers and educational for the public.

Ken Hladek is a nontraditional graduate student at the University of Wyoming. He worked for a bureaucratic municipality in eastern Washington state operating heavy equipment and driving dump trucks, water trucks, and snowplows for 10 years before he started college. He moved to Laramie in 2015 and completed a bachelor’s degree in Anthropology in 2019. He is currently working toward earning a master’s degree. Ken has participated in excavations to researchers and educational for the public.
(Interns continued) across the state of Wyoming and at a Bronze Age site on the Eurasian steppe in Russia. Ken explained that he applied to work with the Vore collection this way: “I enjoy zooarchaeology, and working with the Vore sites’ massive bone assemblage allows me to expand my knowledge and skills in this specialized field of archaeology. I am learning to identify and side bison bone elements, which will help me to recognize and identify ungulate elements recovered at other archaeological sites I work in the future.”

New Billboard!

A new billboard has been installed on I-90 to advertise the Vore Site. The Crook County Promotion Board paid for the design, vinyl and the billboard itself. VBJF member Jennifer Womack, owner of Sagebrush Marketing in Newcastle, Wyoming, created the design.

Permanent Shelter Constructed for Sandbox activities

A high point for many students who participate in field trips to the Vore Site is the sandbox activity. At this station, students dig for a souvenir arrow point. On windy, rainy days in the spring and fall, this station is not always a favorite of our volunteers! This fall, a shelter was constructed for the sandbox activities.

Construction of this shelter was made possible by generous donations from Neiman Enterprises, the National Buffalo Foundation, and a volunteer who has stood in the wind and rain supervising the sandbox activity. Donations in memory of Shirley Garfoot Vogel, who loved Sundance, Wyoming, and in memory of VBJF interpreter and volunteer Katy Davers also helped fund the construction.

We also mourn the passing of Katy Davers, who died in May after a battle with bone cancer. Katy was a very special ambassador for the VBJF. She worked as an interpreter for several summers and was a dedicated volunteer. She always requested to be assigned to the station where we lead students to think about what life would have been like for the people who hunted at the Vore Site. We are pleased that some of the funds from Katy’s memorial will help construct benches for the shelter.

Tribute to a Giant – George Frison

“If I have seen farther than others it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants”. Issac Newton

It is a truism of science that most research builds on the discoveries, insights and knowledge provided by previous scientists. Within all scientific fields there have been “giants” who laid the basic scientific concepts that are the foundations of the various disciplines.

The field archaeology lost one of its giants this summer when Dr. George Carr Frison died at the age of 95. Frison’s unconventional career trajectory would not even be possible in today’s academia, partly because he started so late. He grew up on a hard-scrabble ranch near Tensleep, Wyoming, spending his youth and young adult years trailing livestock and hunting in the canyons draining the west side of the Bighorn mountain range. Frison acquired a keen interest in the Native Americans whose artifacts he found in ancient campsites and rock shelters. As a hunter, he also developed an ability to “read the landscape” as an Indian hunter would have. Where would they move? What resources were available in terms of water sources, potential shelters, fuels, edible or medicinal plants, tool-making stone, etc.? How can the features of this landscape be used or enhanced to make successful communal hunts for many bison, antelope or bighorn sheep?

Frison entered the University of Wyoming (UW), at age 18 in 1942. His stay was brief. Like millions of other young men his plans were overwhelmed by World War II. Frison joined the navy and was deployed in support of amphibious forces in the Pacific. He was discharged after four years and returned to operate the ranch.

His fascination with Native American artifacts continued however, and his knowledge base grew. Though an amateur, he joined the Wyoming Archaeological Society. In that context he met and conversed with UW geology Professor William Mallory who encouraged Frison to reenter UW in 1962 at age 37. Once back in college, Frison put his foot down hard on the accelerator. In just five years he completed his undergraduate and Master’s degrees in Laramie and his PhD program at the University of Michigan. To accomplish that he often carried two to three times the normal academic credit load per semester, and he excelled while doing it. After receiving his doctorate in 1967, he returned to the University of Wyoming as Chair of
the new Department of Anthropology and as Wyoming’s first State Archaeologist. He held the latter position until 1984.

From then on, Frison was a direct participant, supervisor or advisor on most of the major archaeological investigations in Wyoming on the most significant sites in the northern Great Plains and Rockies. The litany includes … Colby (Clovis)… Hanson (Folsom)… Medicine Lodge Creek, Casper, Agate Basin, Hell Gap, Horner, McKean, Hawken and dozens of others, including the Vore Buffalo Jump. Frison had the rare ability to absorb the detailed information from various archaeological sites and to synthesize that knowledge into the much larger understanding of the regional and cultural history of Native Americans.

Frison authored, co-authored, edited or co-edited six books. The two editions of his classic Prehistoric Hunters of the High Plains are a synthesis and chronology of northern Plains history. He authored more than 70 publications in professional journals and made more than 60 technical presentations at regional, national and international conferences. His work was supported by grants from prestigious organizations including National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Geographic Society and National Park Service. Though he was most famous as a researcher and author, Frison influenced the education and careers of hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students as a teacher. Frison had many important offices and roles in professional organizations and received many honors for his work. He was named the University of Wyoming’s first (in 1997) and remains its only, member of the National Academy of Sciences, an honor just this side of a Nobel Prize for America’s academics.

Vore Buffalo Jump Connections

One day in the late 1960’s, a young undergraduate with an engineering major, appeared in George Frison’s office. Perhaps because the earnest young man shared Frison’s strong interest in Indian artifacts and came from a family with an agricultural background and a small town in Wyoming, he and Frison developed a rapport. The student’s name was Charles Reher. Reher, who was already married with a couple of children, asked Frison if it was possible to earn a living as an archaeologist. Indeed you can, replied Frison, in fact I can pay you to help catalog the University’s collection of stone scrapers. Reher was hired on the spot and switched majors to anthropology. It was the start of Reher’s career and a collegial relationship with Frison that spanned 60 years.

A few years later, Interstate Highway 90 was being constructed across northeast Wyoming. The original surveyed route would have taken the eastbound lane of I-90 adjacent to a large sinkhole on a ranch owned by Woodrow and Doris Vore. There was the question of stability: would the highway collapse into the sinkhole at some point? The engineers bulldozed a crude road into the sinkhole and sent a truck with an auger to check out its floor. Wherever they punched a hole, they encountered buffalo bone within a few feet of the surface. Clearly this was an archaeological site, but the construction leaders would have preferred to keep quiet about the discovery and continue building the highway as planned. However, an engineer on the crew, Bart Olson, blew the whistle and contacted George Frison, reportedly bringing him a box of buffalo bones from the site.

As State Archaeologist, Frison had the clout to go to the Department of Transportation (DOT) and convince them that the site must be investigated. Legend has it the Frison actually plucked the box of bones on the DOT director’s desk. In any case, the decision was made to move I-90 a few hundred feet south and to do an archaeological survey of the sinkhole. Frison, the former rancher, easily established trust and friendship with the Vore family. The excavation began in the summer of 1971, and Frison chose Charles Reher, who was then starting his Master’s Degree, to be his crew chief. Reher, now Professor Emeritus at UW, would become chief scientist for the Vore Buffalo Jump Foundation (VBJF). Frison was the official lead scientist during early excavations of the Vore Site. He helped develop the excavation plan and supervised the work, but Reher and his crew did most of the actual excavation in two summer field seasons. Data from the Vore Site were the basis for both Reher’s M.S. thesis at UW and his PhD dissertation at the University of New Mexico. After completing his doctorate, Reher joined the UW anthropology faculty. The Vore Site has remained one of the important aspects of Reher’s professional endeavors. Reher initiated the development of the Vore Site as a research, education and economic development project and he and Frison cooperated with the Vore family in the donation of the Site to UW. Years later the property was deeded to the VBJF which is now responsible for its continued development. The Vore Site is a significant part of the legacies of both Frison and Reher, and the VBJF Foundation owes a debt of gratitude to both men.
Unusual Annual Meeting

In lieu of our usual in-person annual meeting to update Foundation members and elect officers, the board will hold a Zoom meeting on Saturday November 21 at 2 pm Mountain Standard Time. Foundation members are invited to log in to hear a summary of 2020 at the Vore Site, including our financial standing, and participate in election of officers. Lifetime members and members in good-standing for 2020 or 2021 can email info@vorebuffalojump.org for log-in information.

Please Renew Your Membership

We encourage you to renew your membership in the Foundation. Membership dollars support our educational programs, allow us to create new exhibits, and pay for site upkeep. This year, those who renew their membership for 2021 by December 31, 2020 will be entered in a drawing for the fleece blanket (50 inches x 60 inches) pictured below. Those who donate to the VBJF between now and December 31 will also be entered in the drawing (one chance per $50 donated).

VBJF Welcomes New Board Members

Cody Newton joined the VBJF advisory board this fall. He is an archaeologist who has been working in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains for over 20 years in both academia and cultural resource management. He has a B.A. in Anthropology from the University of Wyoming, an M.A. in Anthropology from Colorado State University, and a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Colorado—Boulder. Cody is currently a Senior Archaeologist and Principle Investigator at Quality Services Incorporated in Rapid City, South Dakota. Cody brings expertise in Paleoliindian studies, bison evolution, prehistoric and historic bison-based subsistence, and early European exploration to the Vore advisory board. His research has been published in Current Research in the Pleistocene, Ethnohistory, Great Plains Research, Plains Anthropologist, PaleoAmerica, Quaternary Research, Utah Archaeology, North American Archaeologist, and Wyoming Archaeologist.

Lynette Wermager is the newest addition to the VBJF working board. She replaces Jena Rizzi, who, due to a change in job, has left Sundance. Jena will remain involved with the VBJF as a member of the advisory board. By our by-laws, those on the eight-member working board must live within a 50-mile radius of the Vore Site. Lynette lives in Spearfish with her husband, Kevin, is a seasoned fly-fisher, and enjoys reading and learning about the history of the Black Hills. She is right at home in the Black Hills after spending time horseback riding the entire Mickelson trail, a few years back. Lynette brings an educator’s perspective to the VBJF board.
She is a veteran elementary school teacher who currently teaches third grade at the Lead-Deadwood elementary. Lynette notes, "I was introduced to the VBJ through an information table at the home show in Spearfish. The volunteer presented the VBJ well and intrigued me to learn more about it. Now my third graders visit the VBJ every year on a field trip to learn and appreciate this wonderfully historic site right here in our area!"

Lance Rom is also new to the advisory board in 2020. Lance has an M.A. degree in anthropology with a focus on public archaeology and over 40 years of experience in Wyoming and the northern Plains archaeology. He worked as a consultant in Wyoming from 1980 to 1984 and became the Forest Historic Preservation Officer for the Black Hills Forest and Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands in 1984. In 1997, Lance transferred to oversee the cultural resources programs for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in North and South Dakota. In 1999 he formed Quality Services, Inc., which works on archaeological projects in over 30 states. Lance plans to retire later this year and expects to have ample time between photography, traveling, and four-wheeling to help the Vore Foundation achieve their goals.

In mid-June, archeologists from the area were recruited by board member Jena Rizzi to clean the bone bed at the Vore Site. The cleaning is necessary at least once per year because of dust collection, water droplets that condense and fall from the ceiling and rodent activity.

Artifact of the Week

As part of its educational outreach, the VBJF has created an "Artifact of the Week" posting on its Facebook page. Here's an example:

This week’s artifact (many thanks to Molly Herron!) is a bone from the forelimb of a bison. The ulna and radius in the lower front limbs of ungulates (hoofed herbivores like bison) are often fused to enable them to carry great weight. In contrast, the ulna and radius of humans (see the diagram) are unfused to allow us to twist our arm-sars. The complete fusion (or ossification) between the ulna and radius in bison does not occur until the animal is middle aged. This provides clues about how old an animal was at the time of death, which helps archaeologists understand the age ranges of the bison killed in traps like the Vore Site sinkhole.
Catch the Dream...
Become a Vore Buffalo Jump Foundation Member
Vore Buffalo Jump Foundation, PO Box 369, Sundance, WY 82729

Name_________________________________       Mailing address______________________________
City___________________________________       State_____________  Zip code__________
E-mail address_________________________       Telephone _________________________________

___ Yearly Membership ($50)
___ Lifetime Membership ($500)
___ Donation of $__________
___ Corporate ($250)
___ Please contact me as I would like to volunteer

Donations also accepted (via PayPal) through “Donate” button at vorebuffalojump.org. Contact us by e-mail at info@vorebuffalojump.org.

The VBJF is a 501(3)(c) non-profit organization. The Foundation is administered by a volunteer board and has almost no administrative overhead. Membership dollars and contributions go almost entirely to fund site improvements and interpretive programs.