

Archaeological Visitors

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I first became aware of archaeological visitors (we called them tourists), in the early twenties, when our family used to spend the summer at the ruins of the old Pueblo of Pecos, about thirty-five miles east of Santa Fe. My father was then engaged in a long-term program of excavation on the remains of that large Indian town that was finally abandoned by its few surviving inhabitants in 1838. If there were any visiting tourists at Pecos in 1915, the first summer I spent there, I don't remember them, and the roads were so bad that I suspect that few, if any motorists stopped by to see the old Spanish mission church and my father's digging. Later, with the improvement of the highway between Las Vegas (New Mexico, not Nevada) and Santa Fe, hundreds of people visited the ruins each summer. They were attracted by a roadside sign—the ruins had become a State park—and the great adobe walls of the mission which were clearly visible from the highway.

Most of the touring visitors were pleasant, unpretentious people, and some of them were genuinely interested in what was going on in the excavations. I remember particularly the extraordinary traveling costumes that many of the women wore. It was before the days of shorts, but not of slacks (although there was nothing slack about them—they all seemed to be skin tight and were generally short in the leg). Combined with high-heeled shoes and topped by hats that I recall as a kind of mixture of old fashioned sunbonnet and locomotive engineer's cap, some of the ladies were a sight to behold.

The reaction of most archaeologists to visitors to their projects, quite naturally depends on their

manners and interest. Visitors are generally welcome, especially if they are intelligent, interested, and considerate. At Pecos, as I recall, most of them refrained from knocking loose earth into trenches where my father and assistants were cleaning skeletons, but I think it is probably fair to say that the amusement of the archaeologists at the often weird costumes of the ladies and the forthright questions of many of the less inhibited of both sexes was equalled by the tourists' frequently obvious doubts as to the sanity of the archaeologists.

At Pecos there were never enough visitors to be more than a mild nuisance, and the remarks of some of the real "characters," recorded in my father's diary, provided much amusement at the time and material for his memoirs. There are still, even in the United States, archaeological digs that, by reason of remoteness, bad climate, or lack of anything of interest to the general public, attract far fewer visitors than came to Pecos. Abroad there are many more, but growing genuine interest in archaeology and the ease of air travel have resulted in large numbers of visitors to sites that formerly required real expeditions to reach.

The best example in the Museum's recent experience is that of Tikal, situated in the jungle of northeastern Guatemala. Until an airfield was cut out of the forest in 1950 Tikal could be reached only by mule-back from Uaxactun, about fifteen miles away. The airstrip at Uaxactun, developed for the transport of chicle for the chewing gum industry, was originally a mule pasture, cleared by the Carnegie Institution of Washington for pack animals needed to



supply their excavations at the then uninhabited site during the twenties and thirties. Supplies and workers came by boat up the Belize River and thence to Uaxactun by mule. Needless to say, casual visitors were nonexistent, and planned trips by interested colleagues and trustees of the Institution were few.

Today at Tikal, with three scheduled flights weekly from Guatemala City, and numerous week-end special flights, thousands of visitors annually come to the site, which is rapidly becoming one of the principal tourist attractions in Guatemala. The Museum welcomes them, because we are anxious to have the support of people interested in the success of this ambitious, long term project, of basic importance to our knowledge of Maya civilization. We feel that there is no substitute for a visit to this great site to stimulate interest in it. We feel the same way about visitors to our other digs, such as that at Gordion, in Turkey, relatively off the beaten track of tourism and Hasanlu, in Iran, which is, under present conditions, very difficult for the ordinary traveler to reach.

Feeling as we do, we try to do more than "put up" with visitors, as have hundreds of conscientious archaeologists all over the world, often in the face of considerable annoyance. At the risk of giving unnecessary advice to some, but perhaps being helpful to others, I offer some suggestions on how to be a good visitor to an archaeological site, especially one at which work is going on.

Firstly, since intelligent interest is basic to understanding, one should learn something of the historical and cultural context of the ruins

one plans to see—J. E. S. Thompson's *Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization* if one is going to Guatemala or Yucatan, for example. This may then be profitably followed by reading about individual sites, and especially by studying maps of them if such are available.

The visitor is then prepared to ask sensible questions; he will have some feeling for unfamiliar styles of art and architecture and should, if all goes well, return with a far better grasp of what the archaeologists are doing than if he had arrived at the scene of their work clothed in complete ignorance. Allow enough time. No one can get the true feel of a great site like Tikal in a few hasty hours.

Secondly, remember that the scientific staff is composed of very busy and dedicated people who are apt to be found completely absorbed in what they are doing. So, if you come upon a young man measuring and plotting the profile of a trench, don't expect him to stop his work right away. Be careful in approaching the edges of excavations—nothing is more annoying than a shower of loose earth on your notebook and down the back of your neck caused by someone's carelessness. Besides, you might fall into the excavation and hurt yourself. Wait until the young man has finished his absorbing task, or look around for another who isn't engaged in one at the moment; your questions will be welcomed.

If you are interested, have some background knowledge, and are considerate of the working staff, your visit will be truly appreciated; the knowledge and satisfaction you have gained will be in proportion.