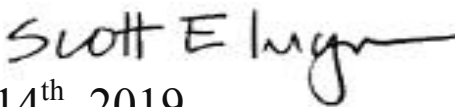


Archaeologist-Private Collector Collaborations:
A Student Perspective

A SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT
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Archaeologist-Private Collector Collaborations: A Student Perspective

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Abstract

This research project explores the impacts of professional archaeology on private artifact collectors, and how understanding both domains is vital to furthering our knowledge of the past. Using the ethical framework laid out in the Society for American Archaeology 2018 Statement on Collaboration with Responsible and Responsive Stewards of the Past, this work aims to combine collaborative inquiry, archaeological ethnography, and fieldwork to partner with a private collector in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. The collection, alongside the narrative of this private collecting couple, provides an important cautionary tale to professionals seeking to better collaborative efforts with other responsible and responsive stewards of the past.

Keywords: archaeological ethnography, collaborative inquiry, collecting, collaboration, private collector

Most names used are pseudonyms to protect identities of informants. If future researchers want to conduct further work with this information they should contact the paper's author.

Introduction

Archaeology weaves together the story of us, humankind, through our collective traces across the landscape. But it has not been until recently that scholars in the field are tuning into the wider *us* and incorporating the voices of those beyond the academic community to aide in this storytelling. Working to include the voices of descendent communities, researchers have found ways to blend archaeological practices with traditional indigenous knowledge to push archaeology beyond perceived boundaries of research methods (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2010: 329). This project centers on another long excluded and highly stigmatized voice—that of the private collector—and how to blend that voice into the archaeological record.

Research regarding such archaeologist-private collector collaborations has grown in the past decade, culminating in the creation of the “Professional Archaeologists, Avocational Archaeologists, and Responsible Artifact Collectors Relationships Task Force (2015-2018)” and the recently published “Society for American Archaeology Statement on Collaboration with Responsible and Responsive Stewards of the Past” (Pitblado et al. 2018 and SAA 2018). The Task Force, comprised of a range of stakeholders, spent three years investigating the archaeologist-collector relationship to determine how such projects could occur within the Society for American Archaeology’s (SAA) professional ethics (Pitblado et al. 2018: 14). The culminating Statement urges professional archaeologists to work with private collectors, with the caveat that they are “responsible and responsive stewards of the past”, i.e. those who have collected or collect legally (Society for American Archaeology 2018). Much of the argument in favor of these collaborations comes from work by Bonnie Pitblado (2014), the Chair of the Task Force, who has written on the immense benefits of working with private collectors. Similarly, Michael J. Shott (2017), informal co-Chair to the Task Force, has argued for the inclusion of collectors for their abundance of regional knowledge compared to the knowledge of a professional. However, as this paper will demonstrate through the story of one private collecting couple, there are problems with looking to collectors simply as sources of useful materials or knowledge rather than partners. Actively seeking research methods that value and incorporate these partners into the academic discourse will create more sustainable collaboration and protect the future of the material record.

A major finding during the 2015-2018 Task Force’s research process highlights the felt impacts of devaluing these potential partners. In order to scope the problem, the Task Force gathered opinions and guidance from a wealth of stakeholders: academic archaeologists, CRM

archaeologists, agency archaeologists, avocational archaeologists, and private collectors. The most commonly received remark was that “archaeologists must stop being rude, elitist, and dismissive of artifact collectors” (Pitblado et al. 2018: 15). The socio-political impacts of elitism in archaeological practice is not a novel topic. Scholarship abounds on the power academia has in determining and reaffirming mainstream evaluations while ignoring interpretations of culturally related heirs (McGuire 2008: 3, Layton and Wallace 2008: 67). Impacts of early colonial programs of archeology have also been dissected, calling contemporary scholars to acknowledge the structures and behaviors within the field that reproduce unrepresentative hegemonic work (Watkins 2015: 25, Pitblado 2014: 341, Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008: 3).

To remedy the imperial impacts of archaeology, this paper employs *collaborative inquiry* and *archaeological ethnography* in order to effectively and sustainably collaborate with private collectors. *Collaborative inquiry* incorporates those considered “subjects” of the research to participate in creating and executing any given project. This form of inquiry opens the discourse to “different publics by working together” and reframes research as a team-oriented mission (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:1). *Archaeological ethnography* is a way of actively listening to participants, or collectors, throughout the research process in order to create space for multiple understandings and backgrounds (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009: 66). Although these methods have been primarily used in collaborations with descendent communities, they also have great potential for remedying the “elitist” and “dismissive” behavior towards private collectors (Pitblado et al. 2018: 15). Through the story and experiences of one private collecting couple in the San Luis Valley, this paper demonstrates how these two methodologies, collaborative inquiry and archaeological ethnography, can be used to both 1) understand how a

private collection relates to the landscape in the San Luis Valley of Colorado and 2) gather oral history as it relates to past collaborative experiences in order to better the future of private collector-archaeologist partnerships. Products of such meaningful and mutually beneficial collaborations will transcend elitist barriers of academic language and foster sustainable partnerships, protecting and preserving the archaeological record in privately held hands. This method should not be taken as a “one-size-fits-all solution,” but rather as one possible approach in response to a very pressing critique (Meskell and Van Damme 2008: 146).

A Note on the Research Team: The Student Perspective

This work was conducted through guidance by many people, primarily Angie Krall, previously the Heritage Program Lead/Tribal Liaison/LGBT SEPM for the U.S. Forest Service, Meg VanNess, Regional Historic Preservation Officer for the Baca National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR), and Scott Ingram, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Colorado College. While guided by these professionals, the entirety of the project’s framing and execution was conducted by myself (an undergraduate student) and a private collecting couple, Martin and Naomi Miller. The use of a student in this particular project was a matter of finding someone accessible with time and resources (Angie Krall, 2019, personal communications). As Bonnie Pitblado (2014) argued in her groundbreaking private collector research, students can increase age diversity on research teams and bring a level of community networking to a project that professionals may not have (Pitblado 2014: 343). However, beyond the pragmatism of student inclusion, they also bring an important perspective to the work. Students are transient characters, both within and outside of a discourse, who are constantly reflecting on the learning process. They bring openness to new methodologies and innovation to research that those deeply engrossed in the discourse may not easily recognize. Students are also learners and listeners by trade. They are

well-versed in the practice of failing and can bring flexibility and humility to research teams. When it comes to new work that pushes the boundaries of a field, students are just as valuable for the work as any professional.

The Research Area: The San Luis Valley & The Baca National Wildlife Refuge

The research was conducted in the San Luis Valley of Colorado, focusing on the cultural landscape of the Baca National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR). Although there is some breadth to research in the San Luis Valley, it still remains one of the “least studied parts of Colorado”, especially in the northern half, i.e. where this project lies (Mitchell 2012: 10). There are multiple Paleoindian sites recorded but very few Archaic (Mitchel 2012: 11). Late pre-contact sites dot the floor of the Valley, especially along the creeks, and there is some evidence of re-occupations (Mitchell 2012: 14). There also may be evidence of some ancestral Puebloan periods in the Valley (Mitchell 2012: 14). Within the last 2,000 years, ancestral Puebloans, multiple Apache bands, Utes, Comanches, Navajos, and many tribes have used the region. Today, the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute remain the dominant cultural groups present in the area (Mitchell 2012: 15). Culturally modified or peeled trees have been a recent focus of research for many in the Valley, suggesting use in the last several centuries (Mitchell 2012: 15). There is also evidence that the Old Spanish Trail, or Ute Trail as Cassandra Naranjo, Southern Ute NAGPRA coordinator asserts, made its way through the Valley (Crawford and Krall 2011). Beyond a compilation of some pre- and post-contact vignettes (Simmons 1979) and recent work on the Old Spanish/Ute Trail, there is a distinct need for deeper archaeological research in the San Luis Valley. People like Angie Krall, Meg VanNess, have begun to connect with the local collector community, especially those with roots as far back as homesteaders, to gain deeper insights into this “cultural fault line” (Angie Krall, 2017, personal communications). Partnering with

collectors in equitable ways creates highly sustainable research to understand a wide expanse of land that requires little to no ground disturbance and utilizes materials already removed.

The Baca National Wildlife Refuge, a large plot of federal land along the east side of the Valley is where the fieldwork for this project took place. Acquired by the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service in 2004, the 100,000-acre land parcel was to be managed by a handful of people, predominantly Refuge Manager, Ron Garcia. Responsible for protecting thousands of acres with little hands-on knowledge of the specific parcel, Garcia turned to the local community for insights. It was then that private collectors Martin and Naomi Miller, along with Naomi's late brother Ted Brooks, became vital collaborators for the preservation and protection of the cultural heritage of the BNWR.

To understand how the Millers and Ted Brooks gained so much knowledge about the BNWR, it is important to understand its history and their history on the land. Sitting with Ron Garcia in the BNWR headquarters, he relayed to me how in 1821, Luis Maria Baca was given a Mexican land grant just outside of Las Vegas, NM. After the Mexican-American War of 1848, the U.S. acknowledged these land grants by allowing the Baca heirs to select five 100,000 acre plots of land around the country in lieu of their previous Las Vegas plot. The fourth plot of land they chose, the Luis Maria Baca Grant No. 4, or "the Baca", became home to many preceding private enterprises. The parcel was exchanged between mining and ranching companies from the mid-19th to late 20th centuries. During this stretch of private ownership, collecting became a widespread practice for many of the homesteading families living on the Baca. At the end of the 20th century, the land became the location of bitter legal battles over water rights, eventually denied to hopeful tycoons by the Colorado Supreme Court. The parcel was purchased by the Nature Conservancy for protection and re-sold to the Federal Government (Ron Garcia, 2018,

personal communications). The southeastern portion became the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, the northeastern portion became the Rio Grande National Forest, and the western portion became the Baca National Wildlife Refuge (Figure 1). The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System under the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is “to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, [...] for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans” (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 2017). This mission also implies the protections and management of cultural resources on the land, the scope of which are still unknown on the BNWR. The Millers and Ted Brooks, all previously ranchers on the Baca Ranch, spent years aiding Ron Garcia and Meg VanNess, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, with understanding and managing the known cultural resources on their new properties. Steve Miller, Martin’s son, also reached out to Angie Krall, who at the time worked for the U.S. Forest Service and was tasked with protecting the Rio Grande National Forest’s cultural resources. Krall collaborated on multiple occasions with the Millers to learn where possible sites were and also initiated the successful partnership between the Millers and myself. The Millers are famous in the Valley for their knowledge of the past, and that intrigue is what brought me to their farm in November of 2017.

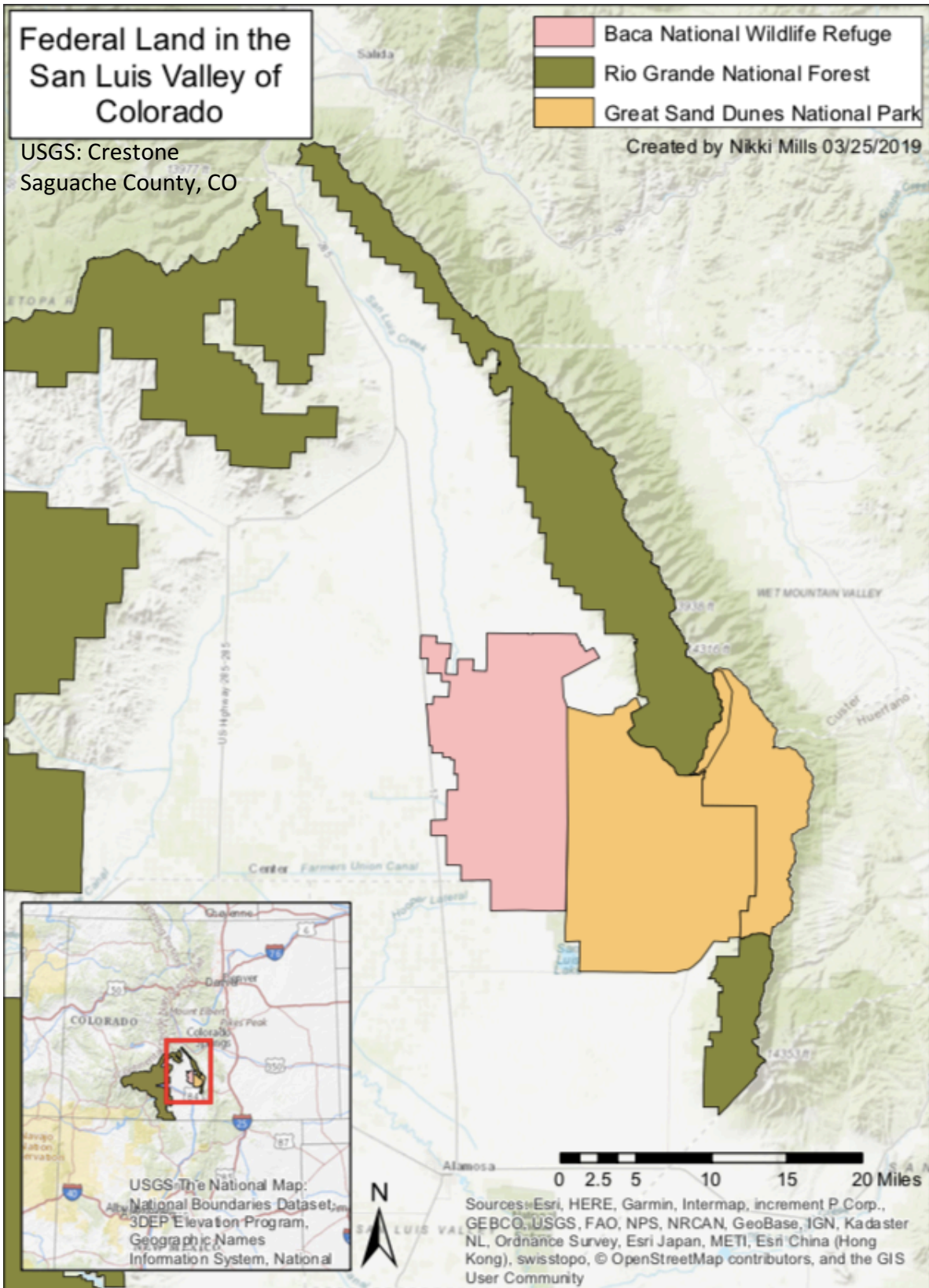


Figure 1. Map of the San Luis Valley (created by author specifically for this paper).

The Collaborators: Martin and Naomi Miller

Rather than dismissing collectors as looters or unethical participants, archaeologists need to recognize the motivations and narratives “underlying the collecting mentality”, and recognize the historical context within which they collected (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2004: 594, Sawaged 1999: 86). Through archaeological ethnography, I inquired about the Miller’s past. For them, collecting on the Baca Ranch was a social practice harking back to their great-great grandparents, a form of personal poetics representing years of work and knowledge accumulation, and a way to play an important role in a scientific field that they otherwise had little access to (Pearce 1995: 28, 31, 33).

Martin Miller’s family has lived in the San Luis Valley of Colorado for decades: his great grandfather homesteaded, and his great uncles made moonshine. His wife Naomi and her brother Ted Brooks’ family moved up from Texas in the 1960s. “It was the artesian water,” Naomi told me, that drew her dad north. Collecting artifacts has been a part of both Naomi and Martin’s families for as long as they could remember. Martin would join his parents and grandparents since he was small enough to fit in the collecting bucket, a tradition Martin and Naomi continued with their own children. Over their 80 years of life, Martin, Naomi, and their kids, along with multiple canine side-kicks, have collected well over 3,000 artifacts from the Valley.

Both Martin’s paternal and maternal grandfathers worked and lived on the Baca when it was a ranch owned by Alfred Collins. By the time Martin was also living and working on the Baca, under the ownership of the Arizona-Colorado Cattle Company, his collecting practices were well-honed from decades of “hunting” the area. His knowledge of the area, by professional opinion, is unparalleled by any living researcher or textbook (Angie Krall, 2017, personal communications). But, it is important to note that he was not always a “responsible and

responsive steward of the past,” and his decades of stripping the land of artifacts reflect that (Society for American Archaeology 2018). While all the assemblages documented in this project were legally collected when the BNWR was a privately owned ranch, that is not necessarily the case with other artifacts in Martin’s collection.

To adhere to appropriate archaeological ethics, we avoided any portions of his collection that had questionable provenance. But, we did not shy away from discussing what legal and illegal collecting looks like and why it is so important that the Millers comply. These conversations were often relayed in the form of a joke: We would walk the landscape and Martin would joke about wanting to collect and wishing I would look the other way, I would respond with a joke about all the paperwork and fines involved, and we would agree to let the artifacts be. While it may seem trite, jokes were a primary form of communication for Martin and me. It was through active listening in the form archaeological ethnography that I was able to respond to Martin in ways he was receptive to. If I had responded with a lecture in response to his joke, Martin would have shut off and stopped listening, feeling judged and dismissed by the rhetoric of the archaeological elite. Vice versa, if Martin collected something on Federal property during our project, I would have stopped the project and marked him as an unethical collaborator. Our joking, no matter how inconsequential it may seem, spoke volumes to the respect we had for each other, each other’s backgrounds, and desire to work in partnership. While our social dynamic and use of jokes cannot necessarily be reproduced in any other given collaboration, archaeological ethnography can be.

It took time to get to a place of comfortable partnership, however. Upon visiting their farm in the San Luis Valley for the very first time I noticed the multitude of cargo shipping containers sitting behind their house. These cargo containers, full of glass insulators, 100-year-

old hot sauce bottles, piles of metates, and other pre-contact artifacts, were packed in between their greenhouse and vegetable patch, chicken coop, and old farm cars. The history of the San Luis Valley lay strewn across one backyard, inextricably entwined forever with the story of their history in the San Luis Valley. Inside were 20 more glass insulators adorning the top of a small hutch displaying other post-contact artifacts. But it was the two large wooden cabinets in his living room, padlocked and unassuming, that held the finest artifacts of the Millers' collection (Figure 2). In each cabinet were 20 to 30 trays, roughly 1.5ft by 4ft. Each tray was protected beneath glass (Figure 3) with artifacts glued flat in rows across foam inserts. Martin pulled tray after tray out for us to inspect. In all, there were about 40 trays, each covered in projectile points, bone tools, beads, atlatl weights, game pieces, or various other pre-contact artifacts. Dumfounded by each other—me by the Millers' immense collection, Martin by my vegetarianism—we recognized that time and dedication to one another was required to find a way to work collaboratively together.



Figure 2. One of the 40 trays of artifacts.



Figure 3. One of the two cabinets.

Archaeological Ethnography and Collaborative Inquiry on the Baca

Our work was theoretically oriented towards the processual-plus school of archaeology. Differing from processual archaeology, processual-plus focuses on impacts of the cultural materials in the past while also looking at the impacts and stories of these materials in the present (Hegmon 2003). Since the late 1980s, this theory of archaeology and the role of archaeologists has forged the way for others to contribute to this wider understanding of humanity. Through a processual-plus approach, archaeology can become a more comprehensive field incorporating many lines of evidence rather than one modernist perspective (Hegmon 2003: 217). For our project, the processual-plus approach materialized in collaborative inquiry and archaeological ethnography, two methods already used by researchers conducting work with indigenous communities to break down the harmful elitist barrier between researcher and collaborator (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2010, Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008, Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009).

Archaeological ethnography, distinct from ethnohistory or ethnoarchaeology, is a method of allowing “multiple coexistences” in research, where various types of knowledge can exist simultaneously (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009: 66 and 83). It creates a space of learning that can transcend multiple publics and worldviews (Laluk 2017: 98) and bridge colloquial or other languages with the academic. Prior to the SAA 2018 Statement on Collaboration with Responsible Responsive Stewards of the Past, Bonnie Pitblado (2014: 342) argued for archeologists to be “savvy ethnographers” to build relationships with locals in the study region. While working with Martin and Naomi Miller, listening as an ethnographer allowed me to hear important anecdotes, jokes, and notice patterns in their narrative that attuned me to who they were as collectors, beyond their collection, magnifying their humanity and reducing elitist

tendencies of archaeological research.

Collaborative inquiry is a method of executing research that turns the “subject” of the work into a valued partner, one who helps establish the research question and partakes in the work (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008: 9) This team-oriented research method is a form of allowing all partners to claim intellectual ownership over the work produced, and foster genuine care for the project. With all partners working together toward a commonly understood goal, any given project can develop into a robust and well cared for endeavor. To achieve the goal of collaboratively inquiring, Martin and I both decided on which sites we would study as they related to his collection, and engaged in the research process together.

Both these methods widen the archaeological discourse, a crucial element in moving away from elitist behaviors. As Foucault (1972: 49) writes: “discourses” are not “a mere intersection of words and things,” but rather they “define the topics that are worth discussing and, most importantly, who can speak on them with authority.” If all partners are involved in determining the research question and conducting work through collaborative inquiry, and are valued voices in the process through archaeological ethnography, this exclusive “discourse” Foucault refers to begins to break down. To conduct inclusive research, it was vital that Martin and I were partners equally engaged in contributing valuable information to a discourse, both speaking on the topic with authority.

The Fieldwork

For two weeks in February of 2018, I moved into a small apartment in the San Luis Valley and began working with the Millers. We built a makeshift “lab” (Figure 4) in their living room and spent our mornings photographing artifact trays that related to our sites (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Martin working in his living room, or the “lab”.

Martin would identify which trays (or rows of artifacts within a tray) came from which site and I photographed them in association with other site-specific trays. When the weather was good, we packed up the car with warm layers and lunch, threw their dog Cupcake in the back, and drove out to the BNWR where Martin led us through sage and rabbit brush to one of the four sites. With paperwork, rulers, camera, and notebooks in hand, we began to retrace Martin’s memory. We walked the boundaries of the sites with a GPS unit and surveyed the surface for artifacts. There was no existing collection or analysis beyond that of a Class II cultural resource survey, perfectly adequate for the information we needed to determine where important cultural resources lay across the landscape. Employing archaeological ethnography, I would ask questions like: *What do you remember about collecting here? Who were you with? What was the weather like?* Martin and Naomi would slowly transport decades earlier and show me where their daughter Kristy found her first projectile point, or where Martin found a small chunk of jacal in 1990 (Site 1). The next few pages outline the results of the fieldwork of each of the four sites (Table 1 for overview).

Smithsonian No.	Site Type	Site Size (m ²)	Density of Artifacts in Field	Artifacts in Miller Collection	
				#	Artifact Type
Site 1	Open Camp	245 m ²	Less dense	750	Projectile points
				60	Bone needles
				80	Other bone tools
				567	Other artifacts
				1,457 Total artifacts	
Site 2	Open Camp	4,313 m ²	Dense	169	Projectile points
				197	Bone beads
				1	Bone game piece
				367 Total artifacts	
Site 3	Open Camp	7,117 m ²	Dense	137	Projectile points
				1	Bone bead
				4	Lithic tools
				143 Total artifacts	
Site 4	Open Camp	642 m ²	No artifacts on surface	21 Projectile points, only artifacts in collection	

Table 1. Summary of Cultural Resources Recorded

For each site and related collection materials, a management data form, prehistoric archaeological component form, photographs, and photo log were completed. All documentation was sent to Meg VanNess at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Refuge for further corroboration. All sites were classified as heavily disturbed due to the natural depositional processes affecting the original location of artifacts, and because of how much has been removed by the Millers. With more time and skill, the photographs from these sites can be further analyzed and synthesized into the archaeological record of the San Luis Valley.

Site 1, a pre-contact open camp. A couple hundred meters south of Crestone Creek, this site was the location of a major excavation conducted by the Millers between 1980-1990 (Figure 5). The decade-long excavation conducted by the Millers, Ted Brooks, and various other family members, left the land with a large rectangular depression. The excavation also supplied the Millers with 1,457 artifacts. This excavation was the result of their knowledge of a highly dense site on the Baca Ranch and their recently acquired skillset from an Avocational Archaeology class they took in the 1980s. While it is not something to condone nor was it something the course was meant to encourage, the work they conducted was on private land and within their legal rights. When I asked Martin why they excavated he told me, because they could. They had the skillset, and nobody was willing to help them out. At the time, there was probably little chance of the Millers being receptive to the notion that the excavation was morally wrong, albeit legally fine. But they “see things differently now,” most likely due to the immense amount of respect that archaeologists like Angie Krall and Meg VanNess have showed the Millers over the past decade. Regardless, they are now doing all they can to communicate what was found during the excavation and aid in the site’s future preservation. Due to the large amount of bone needles, Martin and Naomi strongly believed this may be a Basketmaker site, making it the most northern site of its kind in this region. Whether or not it is associated with the Basketmaker period of the southern Puebloans is up for debate. In a conversation with Cassandra Naranjo, Southern Ute NAGPRA coordinator, she argued that Utes also participated in basket-making and have a stronger history in the Valley. More analysis and tribal consultation would be needed in order to assess if it is indeed a Basketmaker site.



Figure 5. Overview of site with digitized boundary of the unit excavated by the Millers.

Site 2, a dense pre-contact open camp. Similar to Site 1, this site is located south of Crestone Creek and rests within a large sandy horseshoe-shaped crater. It lies along an old perennial creek bed that Martin recalled was used for beaver dams and game hunting during the Baca Ranch. It is very possible that others who worked on the ranch also knew of the site, and could provide even more information about what activities had occurred hundreds of years before. While walking on the surface with the Millers, there was a large amount of groundstone (Figure 6) and a projectile point fragment (Figure 7).



Figure 6. Groundstone on surface of 5SH4971.



Figure 7. Projectile point on surface.

Site 3, a pre-contact open camp. This site is also south of Crestone Creek but slightly closer than Sites 1 and 2. It's a sandy "blowhole" full of gopher holes, greasewood sage bushes, rabbit brush, some yucca plants, tall rice grasses, gramma grass, cactus, and tumbleweed. Martin remembered that at the time of the ranch, it was much more blown out, and artifacts were easy to see on the surface, but after the Federal land purchase, regrowth has reduced visibility. While walking around Martin said to me, "I need to show you something special." We made a beeline to a significantly dark section of stained soil, a deep gray color, at the northern edge of the site. In addition to the dark soil there was a large amount of surface groundstone (Figure 8). The soil staining suggests a hearth or other burning activity, indicating that food processing likely occurred here.



Figure 8. Manos and metate fragments on the surface of 5SH 4972.

Site 4, a likely pre-contact open camp. This site was farther south of Crestone Creek than sites 1, 2, or 3. The Millers collected only a handful of projectile points from this sloping site and no artifacts were present during our field work. If not for the fact that Martin collected 21 projectile points from this site years ago, it would have easily been overlooked.

Conclusions on Fieldwork

For 20 years all Martin did was ride a horse across the Baca Ranch. By his own admission, he spent his days watching the ground just as much as he was watching the cattle. While he only kept sparse notebooks on his collecting over the years, his memory of the Baca's cultural resources and location of important sites is hardy. While locating our four sites, there were seldom structural markers or natural forms to differentiate sandy site to sandy site. But Martin and Naomi were unfazed. They found the sites easily, retracing instinctual paths etched deep into their memories from decades of living, working, playing, and collecting on the landscape. Documenting sites retroactively with older collectors runs the risk of possibly recording inaccurate, misremembered information. But with enough trust and transparency within the partnership, fostered by forms of progressive data collection like collaborative inquiry and archaeological inquiry, researchers can evaluate on a case-by-case basis when memory is strong enough for documentation. In this case, the Miller's memory absolutely endures. It is clear that these sites are important, memorable, and rich in cultural materials. They must be protected and preserved by the management of the BNWR.

Beyond collecting data on the Miller's collection as it relates to the BNWR, our time together and growing partnership soon revealed a much larger piece of their history in the San Luis Valley. The following details the oral history of the Millers, and how listening to and incorporating their story into the archaeological discourse can better future private collector-archaeologist relationships.

The Ethnographic Work

When the weather was bad, or after meals when the team was feeling lethargic, we would

spend time photographing assemblages and talking about the Miller's history in the Valley. Leaning over a table covered in artifacts, Martin would identify projectile points while laughing about hunting mountain lions with a BB gun at age four. Sometimes he would tell me jokes, like the one about how he used to hunt grizzly bears with a club, but could no longer afford the membership fees. Other times, the mood of the room would become more somber, with Naomi quickly interjecting asking if I needed more iced tea. Listening to that silence, I found a much bigger story. Whenever conversation would shift from family or past pets to past relationships with professionals in the region, Martin would get uncomfortable and quiet. It was then that I realized this project was only half complete, and there was so much more to be learned from the Millers' past.

As we conducted our fieldwork, I began to slowly piece together the story of the Millers and past professionals in the region. I felt the pain in his watery eyes as he told me, "they didn't figure a high school kid from the country was smart enough to know anything about archaeology. They wanted nothing to do with me. I took a while to get over that." This moment spoke volumes to the comment made in response to the 2018 SAA Collector-Collaborator Statement. Elitism in the field is real and felt and something Martin had clearly wrestled with. Insecure about his level of education and deeply hurt by feeling inferior, Martin still continued to work with archaeologists.

The Story of Martin and Naomi

When Martin and Naomi were still in high school, they met Jim Harvey. He was fixing his car on the side of the road and they got to talking. It turned out, they were both collectors and deeply loved the Valley. Harvey worked for the Denver History Museum (now the Denver Museum of Nature and Science) and would spend weekends raking sand hills across the valley.

“In the 1920s and ‘30s that’s how they did it,” raking sand hills, picking up what ever came to the surface, then coming down the next week to do it again. As the norm of archaeological practice changed, Martin and Naomi were left practicing the same antiquated methods of the early 20th century, left exposed to harsh critiques decades later (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008: 5).

By 1970, Martin and Naomi were married. They had two children, very little money, and were looking for jobs. That was when they moved to the Baca. “In those days,” Martin told me, “working on the Baca was a good job and it was one of the better positions in Saguache County. You were kind of something special when you worked [there].” At that time, the land was owned by The Arizona-Colorado Land and Cattle Company and was, in Martin’s words, “the greatest ranch in Colorado.” For 20 years, Martin and Naomi made it their home. They had a place to live, would make “\$300 a month, get full insurance, half a beef every 6 months, all the utilities paid.” Martin laughed as Naomi remembered all their amenities, “we thought we were livin’ real good.” When I asked Martin if he enjoyed life on the Baca he responded with his signature grin and said, “For 19 years, all I did was ride a horse.” It also did not hurt that Martin was allowed to collect artifacts and keep what he found while working. More than anything else, that was why Martin wanted to be a cowboy: to ride a horse and hunt artifacts (Figure 9).

But years later, when major developments began happening on the Baca, Martin was worried. He knew every inch of the Baca from his time as a cowboy and soon made it his duty to protect the cultural resources he knew of. To monitor the destruction of sites, Martin and Naomi would check all the new roads and house lots, some of which they already knew were archaeological sites. Martin remembered going to visit a site on the north side of Cottonwood Creek where a sewer system had just been installed. Martin found four pots sitting right on the

surface, except “they were sitting upside down and all that was left was the rims, [...] everything else was just cut off. It was kind of sad. Three of them were black-on-white and one of them was gray. That’s the only black-on-white pots I’ve ever found in the Valley.”



Figure 9. Martin and friend on horses in the San Luis Valley in the 1980s. Photo from Millers’ personal collection.

Around the same time, there was a professional archaeologist hired to survey land for the closed basin project in the Valley. “You know how that operates,” Martin grimaced. “[The development] had a schedule and [the archaeologist] never slowed them down.” Out of fear of site destruction, Martin and Ted went down to see if a site in a sand hill they knew about was still intact, but they couldn’t find it. They quickly realized that it had been used as construction material for the closed basin project. Martin shook his head, “we kept asking him how come you’re destroying all these sites, and [the archaeologist] said there’s nothing buried here, it’s all on the surface.” But in Martin’s mind it was not that it was all on the surface, it was that “he was paid for not finding anything.” The canal was then placed through the bottom of the region, “the most obvious spot for sites in the whole San Luis Valley.”

In an effort to meet other concerned like-minded folks who enjoyed collecting and talking about archaeology, Martin and Naomi decided to help start a chapter of the Colorado Archaeological Society (CAS) in the Valley. They were introduced to the group at a local fair in Alamosa in the 70s and found others to join. But “it kind of died.” They had “a bunch of people signed up and you couldn't talk about points, you couldn't talk about hunting and points, you couldn't talk about collecting. It was strictly by the book.” This “by the book” rhetoric was so dismissive of their collecting behavior that the Millers gave up the society, turning them away from an otherwise accessible resource of archaeological education.

However, it was because of the society that they were able to connect with a professional archaeologist in the region whose parents had been in the society with the Millers. They developed a close relationship with her, helping out at various times on projects across the valley. The most recent project they assisted with was gathering “lithophones” from their collector community for her research on the mysterious lithic instruments (Martorano 2018).

A few years after the society fell apart, an avocational archaeologist class and certification was offered to Martin and Naomi. For three years they took classes with the State Archaeologist at the time who tested them and invited them along to do fieldwork. When I asked about the teaching of archaeological ethics in the class Martin laughed. “I reckon he did [mention ethics]. Yep. He got a deaf ear from us. But now we see things a little different. We know a lot more now than we used to. But [at the time] we couldn't get any help. Nobody would help us. They didn't want us on their project. So finally just decided we'll do it on our own.” They see things differently because of professionals like Ron Garcia, Angie Krall, and Meg VanNess. During the process of protecting the BNWR, the Millers were included as partners, collaboratively inquiring about important sites. They were valued for more than just their

resources and collection, but also their knowledge and input on how to protect the landscape. The humility with which Ron Garcia approached the Millers and Ted Brooks back in 2004 broke down the elitist barriers of professionalism, and allowed space for their voices to join the discourse. If you ask Martin, he will tell you that he is always willing to help anyone at any time. But when he starts talking about these professionals, you can hear his tone changed. His reverence and appreciation for these archaeologists is unique and touching and speaks to the power of the research model they set forth.

However, before helping with the BNWR, Martin and Naomi already had a reputation for their extensive collection and knowledge of the Valley. They had helped on multiple projects, including a minor report for the University of Denver (Haas et al. 1982), and were excited to keep sharing their knowledge. They soon met Smithsonian archaeologists John Dawes and Lily Smith (pseudonyms), who had ventured to the San Luis Valley for research. Martin and Naomi began working with them on multiple sites. They spent “quite a bit of time together.” But this relationship, unlike the others, left a significantly negative impact on Martin. Whenever I would try to talk about the Smithsonian, Naomi would interject, “we had a little trouble with [them] they just didn’t return something that they took. It wasn’t ours but it was a cousin’s of mine.” Naomi would quickly change the subject to show me a picture of her and her kids in the Baca in the ‘80s (Figure 10). This part of the research took longer than the two weeks of fieldwork and required multiple weekend trips to the San Luis Valley to uncover the full story. Through patience and demonstrating my commitment to them, I slowly began to learn the magnitude of the impact that Dawes and Smith had the Millers.



Figure 10. Naomi holding kids Kristy (left) and Steve (right) on the Baca Ranch in the 80s. From Millers' personal collection.

“We spent quite a bit of time together for a while,” Martin told me. “But I just don’t appreciate the way they do stuff.” Martin was referring to Naomi’s cousin’s collection that was borrowed by the Smithsonian couple. “I’ve talked to several other people that they borrowed stuff [from] and didn’t return.” Martin recalled one particular day while working with Dawes in the Valley. All day, someone kept coming around to their excavation units and kicking them in. Martin remembers thinking to himself, *what a jerk*. It was not until years later, when gathering lithophones that Martin learned the real story. Waiting in a parking lot for other collectors to drop off their lithophones, Martin found himself chatting causally with a fellow collector. They began sharing experiences about working with professionals in the Valley and this other collector got really heated. He started talking about how some Smithsonian archaeologist had taken something from him years back, and had been so upset about it that he started kicking in all of his excavation units. That was when Martin realized just how much of a problem John Dawes had created among collectors in the Valley.

The collection that Martin was upset about belonged to Naomi's cousin. Martin told me that when working with Dawes and Smith, he mentioned this particular collection. "It was a cache ... with over 300 blades and scrapers. There was some really unique stuff in there." Dawes and Smith were so intrigued that they made a plan to go down to Texas to see it for themselves. Although Dawes could not join, Smith went along with the Millers herself. They spent two days looking at sites and photographing Naomi's cousin's collection. "When we got all done Smith said man this is really neat, I think Dawes needs to see it. So she wanted to borrow it. [Naomi's cousin] said sure, 'no problem.' So we packed all the stuff up and she took it with her, and that was the last we ever seen it."

When I asked if they reached out about getting the collection back to their cousin Martin said, "More than once. Naomi's brother was really upset. They just wouldn't answer the phone". Fifteen years later, Martin still feels responsible for facilitating the loss and removal of Naomi's cousin's collection. He had trusted Dawes, and Dawes had deeply broken that trust. Martin did not have the means to make it across the country to confront them himself, and instead channeled his frustration toward the future of his own collection. When I asked Martin if he would ever donate his collection he said, "There was a time when it was going to the Smithsonian, but that changed." Still to this day, Angie Krall, Meg VanNess, and Ron Garcia are working to convince Martin to donate part of his collection to them, but he is understandably hesitant.

Curious about what happened to this particular collection and how to possibly begin the process of returning it, my professor Scott Ingram contacted Torben Rick, Curator of North American Archaeology for the Smithsonian, to inquire. While visiting my family on the East Coast, I had the privilege of making my way to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. to talk with Rick about this missing collection. Martin was nervous about me going, but I assured

him that I would be careful.

In our meeting, Torben Rick and I talked at length about how he sees private collections playing a role in the future of archaeology and the importance of building strong connections with local communities. Rick had already meticulously scoured the databases for a collection resembling what I was looking for but to no avail. He promised to keep looking and do all he could to track it down. After the meeting we began walking down the hall and out of pure luck, encountered John Dawes. After a quick introduction, I inquired about Martin and Naomi Miller. He remembered working with them in the Valley years back. “Do you remember the collection from Naomi’s cousin?” I asked. “Why yes,” he responded, “that’s ready to go back.” For weeks afterward, Torben Rick tracked down the collection and finally located a likely match. He oversaw the exchange of photographs across the country until the collection was accurately identified by Naomi’s cousin in Texas. Rick assured me it was on its way. On September 22nd, 2018 I received this voicemail from Martin:

Hey Nikki. This is Martin. Just wanted to let you know that you scored 100. Talked to [Naomi’s cousin] about an hour ago and he got that package. He said it was packaged real good and everything was there and everything is in good shape. So we owe you young lady, don’t you forget.

Of course, Martin owes me nothing. Torben Rick orchestrated the whole return from finding the appropriate collection to packaging it “real good.” But the excitement and amazement evident in Martin’s voicemail demonstrates how inaccessible this world is to him, and how little respect and reciprocity he expects from professional institutions like the Smithsonian Museum. While this triumph motivated Torben Rick to seek out Angie Krall and continue to return removed collections, I began to process the return’s murkier implications.

While the collection was never displayed at the Smithsonian to my knowledge, nor incorporated into any research by John Dawes or Lily Smith, it still possessed the possibility of public display and education while at the museum. Now back in the private sector, the public access to these cultural materials is almost nil. Although this is the antithesis of archaeological work, this action will hopefully heal a broken trust, and that is more important in these collaborations. When focusing too closely on the materiality of the archaeological record, it is easy to be blinded to the ways that archaeology impacts contemporary relationships, exemplified here by Dawes. By removing this collection and breaking trust, for the sake of the artifacts, Dawes put the relationship he had with these private collectors on the line, and jeopardized the possible curation of Martin and Naomi's collection. By focusing more on people in these collaborations, without steam rolling past them with professional trimmings, archaeologists may actually be able to better protect the future of the archeological record. By bettering relationships through methods that work actively against the elitism prevalent in the field, collectors will be more likely to work and share with professionals.

A more complex take away from the return of the collection involves the equity between white collectors and culturally-tied indigenous groups. What does it mean to return something back to an Anglo collector when the artifacts removed are the ancestral belongings of indigenous tribes? For tribes in the United States, getting collections repatriated can take years of incredibly hard work and lobbying (Colwell 2019). While repatriation involves human remains and is distinct from this particular example, this collection's hurried return when involving Anglo participants seems to highlight a level of inequitable access. This issue is complicated, and requires deeper thought into how to proceed in combining the needs of these two stake holding groups: private collectors and indigenous groups.

This return was clearly both beneficial and deeply questionable. Only time will tell if this was the right decision or not, but regardless it initiated a chain of events that will hopefully heal other collector-archaeologist relationships in the San Luis Valley and shed light on equity involved in returning artifacts. Torben Rick, in contact with Angie Krall, is working to find more collections to return, and I myself am determining how to bring Martin Miller into conversation with local tribes in Colorado.

Conclusion

Working with humans is messy. It cannot be reduced to simplistic methods of data collection. It requires constant flexibility, humility, creativity, and in this case, humor. Students are uniquely poised for this work as they are well versed in all these skills. Unique innovations and perspectives must be elicited to push archaeology, a field historically centered on engaging past peoples, towards working with humans in the present. Students, private collectors, indigenous tribes, local land owners and managers, the general public, and others, can all be important partners in creating progressive inclusive work. As various groups of contemporary peoples are engaged, however, different problems will arise.

This paper was a demonstration of one of those particular problems: elitism within the professional sphere of archaeology as it relates to collaborative work with private collectors. Collaborative inquiry and archaeological ethnography were employed to actively fortify the research process against perpetuating elitist behaviors. By listening to the voices of private collectors and fostering a deep sense of partnership, four new archaeological sites were located for future protection and preservation, and an important story of detrimental collaboration was uncovered.

The role of the archaeologists becomes more complex as more people are included in the process. To reframe the professional archaeologist as mediator between the past, present, and future, rather than intellectual authority, reaffirms the goal of protecting and preserving the archaeological record without asserting elitist structures. As mediators, archaeologists can be better stewards of archaeological knowledge by providing access to greater communities of knowledge. For example, the Millers have had almost no experience with the local Native community, but could become valuable partners to the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute, and vice versa. By facilitating a meeting of the two, archaeologists can unite otherwise adversary groups under a common goal of material record conversation, as long as relationships with both groups are appropriately cultivated. With the resources of professional archaeology and a dedication to mutual growth, archaeologists can become not only stewards of the past, but mediators of the past, present, and future, bringing all stakeholders of archaeology together to tell the story of *us*.

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