Dutton's Dirty Diggers
"She Taught Us to be Bold"

By Leslie Cohen
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Bertha Pauline Dutton changed lives. In the fall of 2004, four “Dirty Diggers” arrived in Santa Fe to celebrate their experiences in her southwestern archaeology programs for Girl Scouts. Known as “Bert” to her colleagues and myriad students, Dutton’s career in New Mexico spanned nearly sixty years. As a scholar, educator, and museum administrator, she possessed the rare ability to communicate complex anthropological concepts to the public in ways that were instructive and compelling. Although none of the women attending the fiftieth Diggers reunion went on to become an anthropologist or archaeologist, all agreed that the time they spent with Dutton, traveling through the Southwest and excavating in the Galisteo Basin, changed their lives forever.

The Museum of New Mexico was Dutton’s professional home from 1935 until 1965. Along with her mentor, Edgar Lee Hewett, she was committed to developing the Museum as a nexus for conducting research and educating the public about the rich cultural heritage of the Southwest. Her long list of accomplishments suggests she was New Mexico’s version of the Renaissance woman. From 1939 to 1959, Dutton served as the Museum’s curator of ethnology. She moved into the management of interpretive exhibits until 1962 and then directed the Museum’s Research Division until retiring in 1965. In addition, she lectured throughout the state as the Museum’s adult education instructor for ten years. From 1966 to 1975, Dutton served as director of the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, a period in this institution’s life that included the beginning of its transformation into today’s Wheelwright Museum.

Dutton reached the public through her writing as well as museum exhibits and lectures. During her professional career, more than 100 of her articles appeared in El Palacio on subjects ranging from technical archaeological reports and new Museum acquisitions to the adventures of her Girl Scouts on the road and their discoveries at the Pueblo Largo excavation. Her publications reflect her wide-ranging anthropological interests. Sun Father’s Way: The Kiva Murals of Kuaua (1963) interpreted the sacred paintings at Coronado State Monument using an innovative combination of ethnographic and archaeological research. Her dissertation research in Mexico appeared as Tales of the Toltecs (1955), A Brief Discussion on Chichén Itzá (1956), and Studies in Ancient Soconusco (1958). The popular Myths and Legends of the Indians of the Southwest (co-authored with Caroline Olin in 1978, and Let’s Explore Indian Villages–Past and Present (1970), provided general readers with vivid portraits of Native American culture. Regrettably, her extensive research at the Galisteo Basin sites of Las Madres and Pueblo Blanco was never published. The manuscripts are archived at the Laboratory of Anthropology, awaiting the attention of future researchers.

The Diggers who celebrated their fiftieth reunion at the Laboratory of Anthropology had participated in the innovative summer programs Dutton designed and coordinated through a
cooperative agreement between the Girl Scouts of America and the Museum of New Mexico. She ran the project from 1946 through 1957, while finishing her dissertation at Columbia University and keeping up with her curatorial responsibilities at the Museum. What began as a “mobile” camping program that introduced young women to southwestern archaeology, blossomed, at the urging of her campers, into a field school at Pueblo Largo in 1951. Dutton chose Largo, thirty miles southeast of Santa Fe, for several reasons. The site’s owner, the Sawyer Cattle Company of San Angelo, Texas, was enthusiastic about the project. Aside from Nels Nelson’s excavations for the Museum of Natural History at the beginning of the twentieth century, the site was undisturbed; Largo appeared to have been spared the depredations of pothunters. The site also fit in with Dutton’s own research questions regarding the possible migration of people from the San Juan River region into the Galisteo Basin during the thirteenth century. The Black-on-white ceramics at Basin sites like Largo, which Dutton believed had painted designs similar to those found in the Mesa Verde region, suggested a tie between the two areas. Nelson’s early excavation at the site indicated that one of Largo’s early temporal components coincided with a notable increase in the Basin’s population, suggesting people were moving into the area. The stories Diggers told and the articles they wrote after returning from the field indicate they were very aware that they were participating in a serious scientific inquiry. Dutton taught them that the depredations of pothunters. The site also fit in with Dutton’s own research questions regarding the possible migration of people from the San Juan River region into the Galisteo Basin during the thirteenth century. The Black-on-white ceramics at Basin sites like Largo, which Dutton believed had painted designs similar to those found in the Mesa Verde region, suggested a tie between the two areas. Nelson’s early excavation at the site indicated that one of Largo’s early temporal components coincided with a notable increase in the Basin’s population, suggesting people were moving into the area. The stories Diggers told and the articles they wrote after returning from the field indicate they were very aware that they were participating in a serious scientific inquiry. Dutton taught them that
DIRTY DIGGERS

archaeology was not a treasure hunt, but a systematic inquiry.

There are many “ground-breaking” aspects to the Girl Scout programs. The 1940s and 50s were not a time when groups of teenage girls traveled the dusty and dangerous roads of the Southwest in vehicles of questionable reliability. But for some reason, Girl Scout headquarters saw it differently and supported these trips, even as Dutton’s colleague Ed Ferdon had similar programs turned down by the Boy Scouts of America. This was also not a time when women designed and managed excavations. The perception, if not the reality, lingered that archaeology was a “rich man’s profession.” Edgar Lee Hewett, Dutton’s mentor and Director of the Museum of New Mexico, was one of the few archaeologists of his generation who encouraged women to get into the field. The conventional wisdom was that, if there was a place for women in archaeology, that place was in the laboratory, not the field. Finally, field schools were designed for undergraduate and graduate students, with much of the heaviest work done by paid laborers, not students as young as fifteen. Newspapers covering the dig marveled at the fact that young women could get dirty, camp rough, and wield pickaxes. Primitive conditions included plunging into a nearby stock tank to get rid of some of the grit and cool off. The Scouts, of course, loved it. “We shoveled like veteran ditch diggers and regarded it all as a vacation,” reported a Digger in American Girl Scout.

Dutton had well-articulated reasons for putting teenagers in the field. Archaeologists in New Mexico were concerned about the exuberant but completely unsystematic digs Scoutmasters were undertaking with their troops. At the 1947 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Dutton described what sounds like a very modern vision for public education. In her address, “Conservation of Antiquities by Youth,” she reasoned that “enlightened youth will be far less likely to destroy antiquities” if they know their value to society. “An important phase of any [education] program would be the stressing of conservation in every possible way; conserva-

Undergraduate field school season. According to the Diggers who returned to Santa Fe in 2004, the mapping, sketching, recording, and cataloging they learned instilled an intellectual discipline they carried throughout their professional lives. Dutton’s marginalia in their field logs and reports attest to the high standards she required of her young excavators.

The Diggers came to New Mexico from more than twenty states, spanning the country from California to New York. Economic differences between the campers were eased by the Girl Scouts, which initiated a campership program for Scouts unable to pay the $40 tuition (approximately $300 in today’s dollars). There were also cultural differences. Each summer Dutton invited young Pueblo women to participate in the project. Women also came from the urban areas surrounding Washington, D.C., and New York City, as well as from ranching communities in Colorado and Montana. The great unifying factor was that all the young women had spent several years in the Girl Scouts. They were Senior Scouts, between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, who had participated in at least one of Dutton’s 1,200-mile mobile camp explorations. To join the dig, a Scout had to be nominated by her local chapter and accepted by the National Headquarters in New York. Dutton’s list of requirements for her excavators included a “real love of camping; ability to see what needs to be done and do it; good health and the judgment to care for it,” and perhaps most importantly, an “appreciation of people with different racial, religious and cultural backgrounds.” In addition to being good group
members, Scouts had to be skilled at pitching and maintaining tents; tying knots; taking care of and using axes and shovels; and adhering to sanitation standards for dishwashing, dealing with garbage, and maintaining primitive latrines.

Media coverage tended to emphasize the dig’s primitive conditions by contrasting them with idealized descriptions of what the young women had temporarily renounced: “During the school year, a girl may be a sweetheart of her class decked out in silk and satin, but when she becomes a member of this Southwestern archaeological field school, her avocation lacks all the chemistry of glamour … Shovels and brawn take the place of boyfriends, dates, and lipstick.” But these statements probably tell more about the socially constructed role adolescent girls were expected to fulfill during the 1950s than the Diggers themselves. In contrast, when the Scouts wrote about their experiences, they never mentioned lipstick; they described the camaraderie, reported on excavation methods, and noted the fate of the occasional rattlesnake that had the misfortune to wander into the cook tent.

Through example and private conversations, Dutton conveyed to her Scouts that they could be anything they wanted to be, a message that contradicted the “Happy Homemaker” icon society constructed for women during the 1950s. Although images of “Rosy the Riveter” portrayed women doing men’s work during World War II, our society was ambivalent about women remaining in non-traditional professions after the war effort was over. In Dutton’s profession, most archaeologists retained the belief that a woman’s place was in the laboratory, not the field. American culture went further, insisting a woman’s place was in the home, particularly the kitchen.

Women were expected to marry early, stay home, raise a family, and provide emotional support for their husbands when they returned each night from their jobs. College was acceptable, but the degree they were expected to pursue was a “Mrs.,” not a B.A. Print ads, women’s magazines, and home economic textbooks stressed home-cooked meals, new time-saving household appliances, and higher standards of household cleanliness. Television, which arrived in homes during the mid-50s, reinforced these messages with family comedies like Father Knows Best and Ozzie and Harriet. The lesson was clear: when Lucy Ricardo ventured outside her home, the results were an inevitable series of slapstick disasters. Dutton’s Digger project contradicted this portrayal of women, foreshadowing their future in America. It demonstrated that women could work successfully, both physically and intellectually, in a field considered to be a male domain.

Dutton’s Girl Scout field school has left several intertwined legacies. Archaeologically, the artifacts the young women excavated, when combined with their meticulous maps, drawings, and field journals, constitute one of the very few bodies of data available today on a site in the Galisteo Basin. Personally, the Diggers who visited the Laboratory of Anthropology in 2004 agreed that Dutton changed their lives. The simple act of taking each of them aside and asking what they wanted to be was a profound and potentially life-changing event for a teenage girl in the 1950s. All went on to college and professional occupations. They absorbed her mantra, “Do it and do it right!” Bertha Dutton, they agree, taught them to be bold in whatever they chose to do.
EXPLORING NEW MEXICO’S CULTURAL heritage has never been more fun! Adventures in Anthropology (AIA), a support group of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (MIAC), organizes a series of day-long trips and overnight adventures to cultural and archaeological sites around the Southwest.

These trips, led by museum curators, research associates, and other specialists well-respected for their knowledge of Southwest culture and history, provide a unique opportunity to view little-known sites and learn about New Mexico’s cultural heritage from the experts. Earnings from the trips are used to support MIAC’s popular Sun Mountain Gathering educational event, an exploration of Southwest archaeology that celebrates over 12,000 years of cultural heritage and held each fall on Museum Hill. This year’s Sun Mountain Gathering is planned for October 7, 2006.

For detailed information about these trips, visit www.indianartsandculture.org. For reservations, call Monica Vigil, 505-476-1258; call Leslie Cohen, 505-476-1261, for Chaco Canyon trip information.

**Pueblos Leaf Water, Tsama, and Poshuouinge**

**Friday, June 9, 2006**

With Jim Walker, vice-president, Southwest region, the Archaeological Conservancy; and Mike Bremer, Santa Fe National Forest archaeologist.

Tour three Chama Valley archaeological sites that are not open to the general public. The Archaeological Conservancy owns Leaf Water and Tsama; Poshuouinge is on Forest Service Land. Leaf Water is an early example of a cobble-grid garden site with about 100 rooms, which was occupied between A.D. 1250–1350. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, many small sites in the Chama Valley were abandoned as people consolidated into larger villages, such as the 1,200-room Tewa pueblo of Tsama. Poshuouinge is a fifteenth-century 700-room pueblo that Escalante reported in his journals. (The price, including lunch, is $55 for museum foundation members, $75 for others.)

**Tour conditions:** *Strenuous. Total hiking/climbing distance is approximately 3 miles.*

**A Day in the Galisteo Basin:**

**San Cristóbal Pueblo and the Comanche Gap Petroglyphs**

**Friday, June 16, 2006**

With Melissa Powell, Curator of Archaeology, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology.

This trip to Comanche Gap and the private San Cristóbal Ranch in the Galisteo Basin will focus on striking, post-A.D. 1300 rock art images. The southern Tewa ruin of San Cristóbal was once a pueblo that specialized in the trade of prehistoric glaze-paint pottery. Explore the extraordinary array of associated cave paintings and petroglyphs found along the bluff. Occupied until at least 1680, San Cristóbal, with over 1600 rooms, was one of the largest late prehistoric and early historic villages in the Galisteo Basin. Comanche Gap is a vast site famous for its war-related imagery and complex panels of anthropomorphic figures, flute players, serpents, snakes, birds, and stars. (The price, including lunch, is $55 for museum foundation members, $75 for others.)

**Tour conditions:** *Moderately strenuous to difficult. Total hiking/climbing distance is approximately 2 miles.*

**The Spanish Missions of Zia and Jemez**

**Wednesday, September 6, 2006**

With Cordelia “Dedie” Snow, New Mexico Historic Preservation Division.

The Keresan-speaking Pueblo of Zia has been in its present location since the thirteenth century A.D., while the Franciscan mission at the pueblo was founded around 1613. San Diego de Guisewa, the earliest mission and convento in the Jemez, was designed and constructed under the direction of Fray Geronimo Zarate Salmeron some fifteen years after construction of the Zia mission complex. In addition to visiting the missions, tour Zia Pueblo and share a lunch in private homes. (The price, including lunch, is $95 for museum foundation members, $75 for others.)

**Tour conditions:** *Easy.*
Exploring the Past, Out the Back Door: Arroyo Hondo and San Marcos
Friday, September 15, 2006
With historian Bill Baxter; Melissa Powell, Curator of Archaeology; and Tony Thibodeau, Archaeological Research Collections Manager of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology.

Arroyo Hondo, a prehistoric pueblo located five miles southeast of Santa Fe, was home to approximately 1,000 people by A.D. 1330. Established in an area favorable for corn agriculture during the early fourteenth century, the pueblo grew rapidly to become the largest of its time, consisting of twenty-four multi-story room blocks surrounding ten plazas. Explore the remains of the pueblo and find out how dramatic social and climatic changes of the late-Coalition and early-Classical periods affected the ancestral puebloan people who lived at Arroyo Hondo.

Pueblo San Marcos was a regional trade center founded in the mid-thirteenth century and is constructed of twenty-two room blocks (as many as 2,000 estimated rooms), making it one of the largest Southwestern prehistoric pueblos. The site also has a seventeenth-century Spanish mission component, which was the focus of recent excavations by the American Museum of Natural History. (The price, including lunch, is $55 for museum foundation members, $75 for others.)

Tour conditions: Easy hiking.

Following Ancient Footsteps: Hiking Chaco Canyon
September 23-24, 2006

A rare opportunity to walk through Chaco Canyon with one of the leading authorities on this enigmatic and beautiful place.

Between A.D. 850 and 1150, this UNESCO World Heritage Site was an administrative, trade, and ceremonial center with ties to Mexico and Mesoamerica. Within the canyon, see examples of early farming communities, engineered roads, monumental architecture, and astronomical alignments. Ancient religious ceremonies were once conducted at Pueblo Bonito and Pueblo Alto. The hike to the West Mesa includes Peñasco Blanco, an unexcavated Chacoan Great House, a petroglyph panel, and the Supernova Petroglyph. (The trip features two days of hiking with an overnight hotel stay in Bloomfield. Transportation to and from Chaco is not included.)

Tour conditions: Includes strenuous hiking and climbing; 10 miles in 2 days.

Tsiping Pueblo
Friday, October 27, 2006
With Mike Bremer, Santa Fe National Forest Archaeologist.

The Classic Period ancestral pueblo of Tsipinouinge, or Flaking Stone Village, built from shaped tuff blocks, sits along the eastern edge of Pueblo Mesa. Tsiping builders located their village in a perfect place for controlling access into and out of the east side of the Jemez Mountains and the Rio Chama. Wall segments demonstrate ancient construction techniques and identify the clear outlines of rooms. The mesa also has the tumbled remains of cavate dwellings and kivas built into the bedrock mesa. An ancestral home of today’s Tewa Indian communities, Tsiping is the northernmost and largest of the Classic Period pueblo sites. (The price, including lunch, is $55 for museum foundation members, $75 for others.)

Tour conditions: Strenuous hiking. Total walking mileage is about 4 miles.