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Photos available on request

New Exhibit Encourages Visitors to Solve Mysteries

“The Past Exposed... artifacts as clues” now open at the Western Center for Archaeology & Paleontology, poses a series of questions that asks visitors to look at the objects on display for ideas about how they were made and used. While curators of the new exhibit, which opened June 27th, nudge guests gently toward the answers, the artifacts fill out a picture of a culture where form and function were inseparable.

With a little imagination, visitors will be able to follow the thousand-year-old footsteps of hunters as they selected and shaped the stone they bound to the shafts of arrows. The animals they stalked meant the difference between having meat or living on acorn meal. The edges of the points show the careful flaking to produce the best edge. The arrow straighteners speak of the back and forth motion of the hunter’s hands as he pulls the small branches through the deep grooves, focused on making an arrow to fly true and bring success to his hunt. The sharpest stone was prized and stone from far away, like obsidian from distant volcanic deposits, was carried on foot for trade with far-flung groups.

“The Past Exposed... artifacts as clues” opens a door into the everyday life of people who lived near the site of the Western Center itself. As you walk through the exhibit you can visualize your footsteps taking you to an encampment, perhaps just outside on the valley edge near the Western Center. The cooking jar in the case in front of you once bubbled at the edge of a fire. In the shade, acorn

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meal rested in the narrow bowl of the mortar and round-bottomed ollas, their precious cargo of water safely upright, were partly buried in the sand. What happened to the people who wore the shell jewelry? What did they build with their stone hammers?

The exhibit is based on the 80-year-long passion of area resident Harley Garbani, to collect the signs of the past from the land around him. And while “The Past Exposed... artifacts as clues” raises more questions than it answers, the quality of Garbani’s collection impresses with its range and diversity of objects and is a testament to the dedication of one individual to uncover the past of the land around him.

The exhibit runs through September 7th.

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