

NEWS RELEASE

Kaibab National Forest

www.fs.fed.us/r3/kai



For Immediate Release
Nov. 3, 2008

Contact: Jackie Banks
928-635-8314

Volunteers Contribute To Understanding Of Prehistoric Peoples

WILLIAMS, Ariz. – Archaeology is good dirty fun! Or so proclaims the bumper sticker on the truck owned by the Kaibab National Forest’s heritage program manager. And, many people seem to agree, if the volunteer turnout at this year’s Passport in Time project is any indication.

From Sept. 21 to 27, 17 volunteers contributed 880 hours to helping Forest Service archaeologists understand more about the prehistoric people who lived in the lands south of the Grand Canyon that are now part of the Kaibab National Forest.

“This program is so enjoyable,” said Ted Ockrassa, a retired photographer for the Department of the Army who traveled from Salome, Ariz., to participate. “I’ve been interested in archaeology all my life. I kind of missed my calling.”

Passport in Time is a volunteer archaeology and historic preservation program of the Forest Service. The goal of P.I.T. is to preserve the nation’s past with the help of the public. Volunteers work with professional Forest Service archaeologists on diverse activities such as surveys and excavation, rock art restoration, historic structure restoration, analysis of artifacts and more.

The Kaibab National Forest has hosted a P.I.T. project annually for the last 18 years. Over those years, more than 300 volunteers have contributed about 13,000 hours to the Kaibab heritage program. That equals more than six person years of work completed by volunteers.

“The P.I.T. volunteers allow us to get work and research done that we wouldn’t normally have time to do,” said Neil Weintraub, a Kaibab National Forest archaeologist who has been involved with P.I.T. since it became an official Forest Service program in 1991. “I am always amazed at the quality and dedication of our volunteers. Many of them have worked on other P.I.T. projects across the country, and a few have worked with me on the Kaibab before.”

Frances Mayse is one of those dedicated volunteers. Over the last 10 years, she has participated in P.I.T. projects in Utah, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. She said she usually volunteers for two or three projects per year. 2008 has been especially busy for Mayse, who said the Kaibab was her fifth P.I.T. this year.

“I’ve always been an outdoor person,” said Mayse, a Tucson resident. “I’m semi-retired, so I can do this kind of thing.”

Mayse and the other P.I.T. volunteers assisted Kaibab National Forest archaeologists with analyzing ceramics at 14 sites along the rim of Sycamore Canyon. The goal of the analysis was to test a hypothesis raised by former Kaibab archaeologist Dan Sorrell that a certain kind of pottery found in the area gets thicker over time.

By testing this hypothesis, archaeologists hoped to learn more about Cohonina migration through what is now the Kaibab National Forest. The Cohonina was a group of early people who arrived in today’s Kaibab area around A.D. 700. The Cohonina lived in small groups, hunted game, gathered wild foods, and probably farmed in drainages.

“It appears that there is a correlation between the thickness of the pottery and the timeframe in which it was made,” Weintraub said. “According to Sorrell’s hypothesis, the pottery – known as Deadman’s Gray – increases in thickness from A.D. 700 until A.D. 1150.”

In order to help date the pottery – and thereby narrow the timeframe during which a certain area may have been used by the Cohonina – P.I.T. volunteers used calipers to measure small pieces, or sherds, of the ubiquitous Deadman’s Gray pottery.

The overarching goal of the work is to track the movement of early groups of people across the landscape. In addition to assisting with the ceramics study, 2008 Kaibab P.I.T. volunteers also surveyed 210 acres, recorded three new Cohonina villages, monitored 22 sites and conducted all related data entry and analysis.

“It’s great to be able to use the information we gather to educate members of the public about how long this land has been used by people,” said Erin Woodard, a Kaibab National Forest archaeologist and participant in this year’s P.I.T. project. “It’s also great to show the volunteers what we, as archaeologists, do every day and why we do it.”

But it isn’t just the work itself that keeps volunteers coming back, said Ockrassa and his wife, Jane, both of whom have participated in four P.I.T. projects, two on the Kaibab. “It’s the camaraderie.”

Kaibab archaeologists and P.I.T. volunteers camped together at White Horse Lake Campground on the forest’s Williams Ranger District, shared communal cooking duties and meals, swapped life stories and jokes, and always had coffee perking by 5:30 a.m.

The 2009 Kaibab P.I.T. project will be hosted by the North Kaibab Ranger District on the Kaibab Plateau north of Grand Canyon National Park. For more information on the Passport in Time program, please visit www.passportintime.com.

-USFS-