

Sun, The (San Bernardino, CA)

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August 18, 2007

Youths scan forest for artifacts

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Section: News

Estimated printed pages: 3

Article Text:

Photo Gallery: Serrano Indian archeological site

BALDWIN LAKE - With a yellow field notebook in hand, Sharie Greenwood excitedly moves among the fire-scorched pine trees deep within the San Bernardino National Forest.

She is on a mission - to find and document as many American Indian artifacts as possible.

Though only 17, Sharie seems to possess a preternatural knowledge of geology and archaeology.

She names rocks and artifacts lying on the ground about as fast as lightning is known to strike trees in this neck of the woods.

"I've always had an interest in (archaeology)," Sharie said Friday.

She said she stumbled upon her first Indian artifact, a mano - used by Indians to grind food like acorns and pinion nuts - while walking near her home in Phelan.

Sharie was 7 years old.

"I thought it was a dinosaur egg. So I kept it. I thought it would hatch," she said. "I still have it in my bedroom."

Last week, Sharie joined several young ladies who trudged into a remote mountain basin near Baldwin Lake to document the many artifacts found on an ancient Serrano Indian site.

U.S. Forest Service archaeologist Doug McKay discovered the site last year during a lightning strike fire.

Children's Forest, an arm of the San Bernardino National Forest Association, sponsored the archaeology program for youths headed by McKay.

On Friday, Sharie's biggest find was a tiny, 500-year-old arrowhead crafted from jasper, a variety of quartz red in color.

The arrowhead was on what is believed to be a hunting ground. Two dart points dating back about 3,000 years were also found.

"It appears to be a hunting station favored in two different periods in time," McKay said.

Sharie's mother, Michele Greenwood, joined the group during the weeklong adventure.

With her daughter, she has attended many of the outings and shares the same passion for the past.

"I think there's a lot to be learned out here than people give credit for," Greenwood said.

She said that it's been fulfilling to watch her daughter and other kids grow with the program.

"All it takes is a few interested kids and supportive adults," Greenwood said.

Children's Forest is geared toward having youths in grades 6-12 take a leadership role in forest management through formal education and volunteer programs.

Among other things, it offers trail maintenance and reforestation programs.

There is a onetime cost of \$75 to enroll in the program. A uniform is included.

The association hopes to find enough sponsors so it can waive the fee, said Stacy Gorin, education coordinator and lead naturalist for the Big Bear Discovery Center.

Though other participants weren't as seasoned as Sharie in their archaeology, they found the adventure exciting nonetheless.

Tenaya Goldsmith, 18, an intern with the San Bernardino National Forest Association, said the visit to the site was "really cool.

"It's amazing that you can reconstruct how the (Indian) community used to be by little chunks of jasper and clay," Goldsmith said. "You can figure out how people lived thousands of years ago."

McKay illustrated the point with a piece of burnt animal bone found Friday at the site.

He said a faunal analysis of the bone and carbon dating would tell archaeologists what species of animal the Serrano were feeding on and how old the bone was.

But a lack of funding precludes McKay and others from doing the kind of large-scale excavation and analysis of the artifacts they would like to.

"The research potential here is tremendous," said McKay. "This site is huge."

At the end of the day Friday, McKay stood with 14-year-old Natalie Reeder, who attends Rim of the World High School in Lake Arrowhead and has been participating in Children's Forest for the last three years, and went over the day's finds: Artifacts including one arrowhead about 500 years old; two dart points about 3,000 years old; three metates (flat stones used to hold food for grinding); three butchering tools and one quartz crystal, which was sometimes used as a charm by the Serrano.

McKay showed Natalie how to draw a location map of the area that featured contour lines and noting the areas where the artifacts were found.

"Well, you just mapped your first site Natalie, what do you think?" McKay asked the girl as they walked back to join their group and call it a day.

Natalie summed it up in one word: "Cool."

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Record Number: 6660857