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Oklahoma Archeological Survey

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Book Review:

***Ouachita Mountains Archeology: Researching the Past with Two Projects in Arkansas*, Mary Beth Trubitt, 2019, Arkansas Archeological Survey Popular Series No. 6, ISBN 978-1-56349-109-2.**

Scott W. Hammerstedt

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This book, written for a general audience, summarizes 10,000 years of history in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas. Trubitt draws upon data from Arkansas Archeological Society excavations at the Jones Mill and Dragover sites in southwest Arkansas to produce a highly readable, well-illustrated, and informative volume that introduces the non-professional reader to archaeological work. The use of text boxes to supplement the main narrative, along with a detailed glossary of key terms, allow her to present important concepts without dragging the reader into minutia.

The book opens with a brief history of the Ouachitas. This includes an overview of the archaeological, historical, and oral history sources that inform our knowledge of the area. The reader is also walked through the regional timeline starting with the Paleoindian period and concluding with a brief mention of the 20th century. Trubitt also provides brief descriptions of the Jones Mill and Dragover sites, and importantly outlines the research questions that informed her work.

The second chapter is entitled “How Do You Know It’s An Artifact?” It defines what an artifact is and outlines the ways in which archaeologists use raw material, patterns of human behavior, and marks from manufacture and use to determine whether an object is an artifact or not. The chapter closes with important sections detailing how an artifact is not just important for the object itself, but that what it tells us about human behavior and the context in which it is found can be of much more importance. Subsequent chapters draw upon the data from Jones Mill and Dragover (and other sources) to introduce the reader to topics such as

foodways, trade and interaction, lithics, and pottery. Trubitt presents just enough data to make her point without overwhelming the reader with tables. These chapters are very well illustrated, which complements the text nicely.

The book concludes with a brief discussion of key events in the region’s history and what may lie ahead for researchers working in the area. This includes population movements, plant domestication, and studying communities. There is also a section on the development of new technology and opportunities for non-archaeologists to volunteer (which is mentioned in multiple places in this book). There is also a mention of the Caddo Conference that is accompanied by a photo of the Caddo Culture Club at the 2015 conference in Arkadelphia. If I squint at it hard enough, I can see myself way in the back!

Ouachita Mountains Archeology: Researching the Past with Two Projects in Arkansas is a masterful use of real archaeological data from local sites to explain to the lay reader the ways in which archaeology works. The copious illustrations complement the text and bring additional life to the volume. I am sorely tempted to use it the next time I teach Introduction to Archaeology, and definitely will recommend it to people who contact me to look at an object that they have found.