

Summary of Payson Rim Country Museum and Risser Ranch Ruin Field Trip

May 21, 2021

Text below is based on observations by Dennis DuBose who participated on the Field Trip, with some additional research. It was written by Dennis DuBose who is responsible for all inaccuracies and photos (unless otherwise credited).

This Field Trip was sponsored by San Tan Chapter and Rim Country Chapter of the Arizona Archaeological Society. About 15 members of these chapters plus a dog participated.

First, the Field Trippers gathered for a tour of the Rim Country Museum in Green Valley Park in Payson off historic Main Street. This included the Zane Grey Cabin. Secondly, the Field Trippers caravanned to Risser Ranch Ruin across town. This is a portion of a prehistoric ruin that is preserved in a residential neighborhood. It is owned by the Museum. Our guide at Risser was Jim Britton of San Tan Chapter, who participated in the excavation and stabilization of Risser Ruin. The artifacts are curated at the Museum and some of them are on display. Additional Risser artifacts were brought out especially for this Field Trip visit.



Field Trippers Viewing some Displays in the Rim Country Museum

Due to reliance on a cell phone as camera and an incompetent photographer, most of the museum indoor photos were unfocused or darkened, and therefore they are omitted from this summary. Only a fraction of the items displayed are shown here.

The Museum displays range across prehistoric items, Native American items from the time of Western contact, Early Euro-American settlement, and early 20th Century.



Photo by Sharon DuBose

Apache Camp Items and Reconstruction



Arrowheads are nice, but what does one do if the arrows are not straight? One can use an arrow shaft straightener...



Arrow Shaft Straightener made from an Agate Stone



A Similar Arrow Shaft Straightener Found by RCC President Sharon DuBose at Goat Camp Excavation Room 1 in February 2013



An Arrow Shaft Straightener from Risser Ranch Ruin

Risser Ranch Ruin and Goat Camp Ruins are within walking distance of each other and perhaps contemporary.

Here is how to use a shaft straightener. Make it from a hefty stone by wearing a groove in it, perhaps by rubbing an arrow shaft and grit to smooth it. Hold the shaft near its ends with the bent part close to a fire, but not close enough to scorch. Once it is hot and pliable, press it in the stone grooves and bend it straight. Hold until it cools. The shaft should retain its new straightened character.



Photo by Sharon DuBose

Polished Stone Axe Head

Some Risser Ranch Ruin Artifacts are on display in the Rim Country Museum. However, Sandy Carson, President of the Museum and Historical Society (and a

member of Rim Country Chapter of the Arizona Archaeological Society) brought out some more for our tour. They are on the table in the photo below.



Viewing Risser Artifacts



A Few Risser Ranch Ruin Artifacts –
Bracelets and other objects made from Sea Shell,
Obsidian (Volcanic Glass) Points and unworked core,
Quartz Crystals, Ceramic Spindle and Potsherds, and a
Copper Bell (the only one ever found in the area, presumably an import from Mexico)



Close up of the Copper Bell



Some Miscellaneous Risser Artifacts

Arizona Diamonds (Quartz Crystals) are common at Diamond Point, not far from Payson



Assorted Points from Risser



A Sample of Risser Potsherds, mostly not local Ceramic Ware, indicating regional trade



Photo on Display of Excavations at Risser Ranch Ruin. The couple over in the corner are Marie Britton (President of San Tan Chapter) and Jim Britton (Treasurer of San Tan Chapter). Both were participants in this Field Trip.

A number of different organizations excavated parts of Risser Ruin at different times. The land was privately owned and destined for residential development.



This is an original Payson Post Office Service Window from many years ago. Apparently, it was discarded, but someone salvaged and stored it until it came into the hands of the Museum, which cleaned it up and repainted it.

It should be noted that the Rim Country Museum has been extensively reorganized and spruced up. This has been largely finished, but it is still not complete.

Near Main Street and the Beeline Highway 87 is a shopping area known as Sawmill Crossing. It features the Sawmill Theater. It is the former site of the Owens Brothers Sawmill, which operated there in the mid-Twentieth Century. It was later taken over by Kaibab Industries. It was a major employer, especially of the Tonto Apaches in the area.



An Animated Model Sawmill Model Built by one of the Owens Brothers (Kermeth).
Incidentally, when the Owens brothers were boys their family lived in a house a Oak and Main built by Dr. Risser.



A Closeup View of Part of the Sawmill Model.



Photo by Sharon DuBose

Tiny Model Workshop



Foot Peddle Sewing Machine

One of the Field Trippers said she learned to sew on a machine like this.



Wind-up Phonograph and Foot-Peddle Organ



A Wash Sink from Yesteryear – bucket, cake of soap, pumice stone



The Zane Grey Exhibit was still being reassembled. The former exhibit included many posters and other items for movies and TV shows based on Zane Grey novels.



This old family home was dismantled and restored here at the Rim Country Museum. The Museum tour was self-guided, but the Zane Grey Cabin tour had knowledgeable docents tell the story of Zane Grey's life and about the cabin and its contents. Below is the approach to the Zane Grey Cabin.



Photo by Sharon DuBose



The Back Door to the Zane Grey Cabin
No Photographs were allowed inside.





View from the Back Porch of the Zane Grey Cabin

To keep the tour size small, the Field Trippers split into two groups, with one touring the Museum and the other touring the Zane Grey Cabin. Then, the two groups switched.

The original cabin up in the mountains burned in the Dude Fire in 1990. The plans and some photos survived. Photos of the interior while it was occupied only covered one side. When the Zane Grey Cabin replica was built in Green Valley Park, the side covered by the photos was furnished exactly as in the photos. In some cases actual Zane Grey artifacts were donated. The typewriter is the actual typewriter used by Grey's secretary to type up his hand-written manuscripts. In other cases, the objects are actual contemporary artifacts identical to ones in the photos. And some of the items are carefully made replicas. Zane Grey could walk in and it would look like he had left it.

The Museum docents who narrated the Zane Grey Cabin tours were outstanding. They covered Grey's life, adventures, anecdotes, stories, his eccentricities, his travels, his friends, and how his books were received by publishers, readers, and Hollywood. I will not and cannot reconstruct this fascinating tour narration. If you haven't been to the Grey Cabin, you should go and hear all about it, as well as see all of the items there.

After touring the Museum and Zane Grey Cabin, the Field Trippers caravanned up Main Street, heading across town to Risser Ranch Ruin.

Just incidentally, we passed by the oldest building still standing in Payson, which is on Main Street a few hundred yards away from the Museum.

We also passed by two bull elks with large antler racks in velvet standing nonchalantly by the Main Street sidewalk not far from the Beeline Highway 87.

This Field Trip continued across town at Risser Ranch Ruin.

Parking at Risser has always been a problem. The road is narrow and the residential landscaping often comes right up to the pavement, no shoulder to speak of. So, visitors to the ruin have to literally park in the street. Consequently, tour groups typically try to pack into as few vehicles as possible, so not to annoy the residents by parking a lot of cars in the street. But in these times of distancing, carpooling was minimal for this tour.

When we arrived, I noticed a house across from the ruin had a broad hard, flat and level, neat and clear space laid out between the road and the front yard landscaping, something new. Some of our tour group were trying to park as close as possible to this while still staying on the road and not intruding on the resident's property.

Then the fellow came out of his house. He started directing traffic. He was telling people to pull off onto this clear off-road area. "That's what I put it here for," he said, "You are here to see the ruin, right?" Jim Britton, our tour guide walked up and said sort of apologetically, "We are with the Arizona Archaeological Society." The fellow said, "Good, you can always park here to look at the ruin. Anybody can park here to see it. That's why I fixed this area up this way. You can park here anytime." Risser Ruin has good neighbors, it turns out.



Jim Britton Introducing Risser Ruin at the Large Room Near the Street



Photo by Sharon DuBose

Jim Britton, our Risser Ruin tour guide, explained how the land had been platted for residential housing, but several different groups were allowed to do excavations before buildings began to go up. Finally, just this one lot was unsold and excavations there were continuing full bore as houses went up around it.

The owner of the lot told the Museum Staff that they could come and take all of the stones they wanted to build a replica display at the Museum. He planned to bulldoze the lot to make it more attractive to a buyer who would build a house on it. They came to take a look. Rocks are heavy and it would take a lot of them to build even one room replica. Somebody said, "Why don't we just buy the lot?"

It would take a lot of donations to buy it. The lot owner offered the first donation. He said, "Well, I will donate \$10,000 by reducing the price to you by that amount." They began asking around. One of the neighbors donated \$30,000, and then another donated \$5,000. Some others pitched in \$1,000, and other people contributed as well, and so the lot was purchased and now belongs to the Rim Country Museum. That's the story Jim told.

Jim also had stories about the excavation and stabilization as well.

The main story is about the collapse of the back wall of the front room just inches from Jim's person. It is best that you ask Jim for the full first-person account, but I will rough it out here.

The back wall of the front room was double, with the two sides not tied to each other. The wall was leaning into the room. The excavators dug out part of the adjacent room behind it to relieve pressure on it.



But it was decided to try to push the wall up straight. First, Jim photo-documented the whole wall. He numbered every visible stone and documented its location. Then Jim, Bob Wright, and Craig placed a large piece of plywood against the wall in the room and jacks were put in place. Slowly, the wall was jacked into a more vertical position. Jim was walking by inspecting, and Bob and Craig got some 2x4s to brace it up before removing the jacks. Suddenly, the jacked wall collapsed explosively, the wall collapsing into the room, just inches from where Jim, Bob, and Craig were standing beside it. Only the inner wall of the double wall collapsed, the outer wall remained upright.

Jim was determined to restore the wall. He collected the fallen stones and matched them to his documentation. He and his wife Marie spent the whole summer mixing

mortar and relaying each stone exactly in place where it was originally. Jim said he found every one of his numbered stones except one small one. However, he was able to find a similarly-shaped stone elsewhere which he used instead.

So, as Jim puts it, the wall is not original, but every stone (except that one) is original in its original place in its original orientation. Only the mortar is new. The wall looks exactly stone by stone like it did before the collapse, except it is now straight up and down.



Photo by Sharon DuBose



The Wall in Back is the one which Collapsed and was Restored



Jim Tells the Story



Jim Britton Answering Questions about Parts of Risser Ruin Deeper into the Lot



Going Deeper into Risser Ruin Away from the Street





The Back Part of the Risser Ruin Lot. Note the Adjacent House in the Background



Looking the other way, Note the House on the Other Side of the Risser Ruin Lot



Here you can see Parts of the Original Pueblo Ruin Stretching Behind Houses in their Back Yards



On the Other Side the Excavation is more cramped by the adjacent Structure. Parts of Risser Ruin under this Structure were excavated before it was built.



Jim Britton Inspects a Hearth in a Room Adjacent to the Large Front Room on the Opposite Side from the Earlier Views



About to Leave Risser Ruin after a Circuit. This is Where we Came In



Out on the Street in Front of Risser Ruin. A Neighbor Across the Street Has an Outdoor Mining Equipment Museum in their Front Yard





Some of the Field Trippers say that this is a Two-Seater Mining Poop Car.

The Rim Country Museum is located at ...

700 S. Green Valley Parkway

Payson, Arizona

<https://rimcountrymuseum.org/>