

Those Who Made a Difference

Proceedings of the 6th Grand Canyon History Symposium
Grand Canyon, Arizona
November 1–4, 2023

Earle E. Spamer, Editor



GRAND CANYON
CONSERVANCY

CHAPTER 22

Two Years of Public Archaeology at Apex, Arizona

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THE ONGOING APEX, ARIZONA ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT INVESTIGATES A 1928–1936 SAGINAW AND MANISTEE LUMBER COMPANY LOGGING CAMP ALONG THE GRAND CANYON RAILWAY, SOUTH OF THE GRAND CANYON (**FIG. 22-1**). THROUGH SURVEY AND EXCAVATION, WE EXPLORE THE LIVES OF THE

men, women, and children who lived and worked at “Apex,” a name derived from one of the railroad’s station houses. Archaeological evidence has revealed many things, including how the laborers’ largely Scandinavian heritage, Prohibition, the Great Depression, the presence of women and families, and economic status of individuals impacted these peoples’ lives at the rural company headquarters. Following the methodology of the U.S. Forest Service’s (USFS) preliminary recording of the site in 2006, we designate individual areas of activity and artifact concentrations as “Loci” to delineate separate spaces on the landscape.

A key component of the Apex, Arizona Archaeology Project is public engagement. To that end, in 2022 and 2023—the first two of a planned five years—in conjunction with our field school, we ran a series of free and open-to-the-public tours of the site. Led by a student tour guide, paid through a grant from the Arizona Humanities, and the field school students, visitors learned about both the history of the site and the methods and importance of historical archaeology. The Project also produced two educational brochures that were distributed during

tours and are available on our website and at USFS Ranger District buildings (**Fig. 22-2**). One covers the history of Apex and the Grand Canyon Railway while the other discusses the field of Historical Archaeology more generally.

In 2022, nearly 100 visitors toured Apex, and in 2023, Apex was host to 70 tourists. Tours were organized or presented differently according to the ages, physical abilities, and backgrounds of group members in attendance. Project personnel are committed to providing a tailored, yet consistent, experience that is highly informative and interactive regardless of each attendee’s prior archaeological experience. With that said, the tour format saw broad revisions over the course of the field seasons, according to group responses and time spent at each particular locus.

Each tour consisted of our lead tour guide, at least one field school student, and a varying number of site visitors. In 2022, Ashley Mlazgar served as our lead tour guide, providing 15 tours of between one and 18 people. In 2023, Timothy Maddock led 10 tours of between three and 11 people. On average, tours lasted between one-and-a-half to two hours.

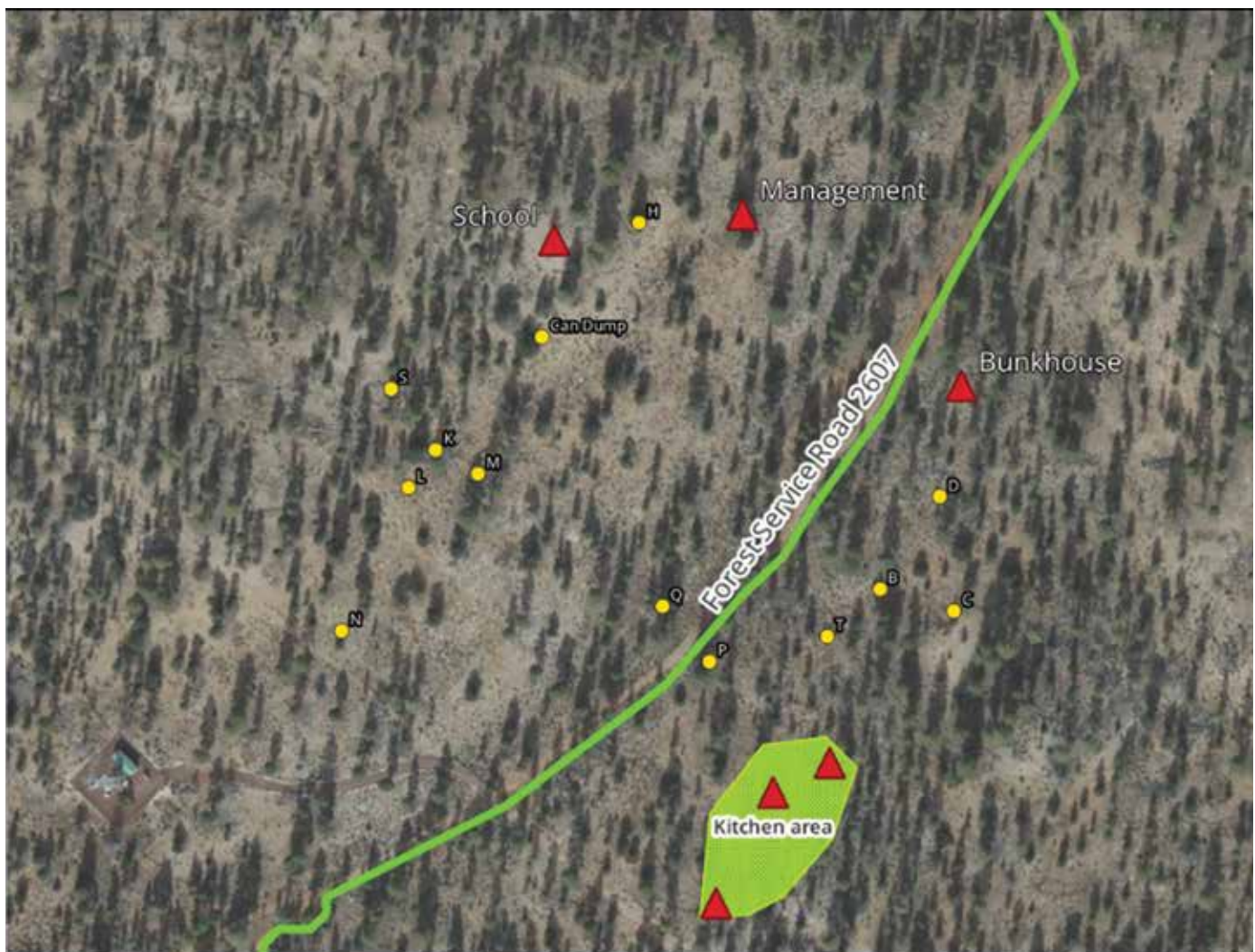


Fig. 22-1. GIS map of the Apex lumber camp, showing lettered Loci that identify key locations on the landscape, such as the Schoolhouse (Locus I), Laborer Bunkhouse (Locus E), and a “Management” Can Dump (Locus G). Map by Timothy Maddock.

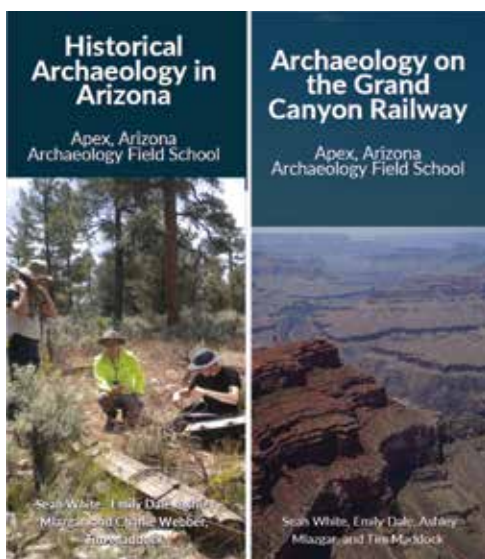


Fig. 22-2. Educational brochures from the Apex, Arizona project.

Groups with small numbers of high-clearance vehicles were instructed to meet at the designated parking area at the site by the Apex Welcome Center, marked by a canopy, tables, and two portable toilets off of Forest Service Road 2607 at the north end of the site. In some cases, our lead tour guides drove down to the intersection of Forest Service Road 306 and State Route 64 in a Northern Arizona University fleet vehicle to meet and transport larger parties or, due to the rugged nature of the roads, to convey those who arrived with low-clearance vehicles. Tour groups then convened at the Welcome Center to find shade, restrooms, sunscreen, cold water, and our brochures. Once visitors were prepared, the field staff formally introduced themselves and provided an overview of the site’s history and a comprehensive safety briefing.

Safety briefings began before the tour, as visitors were instructed earlier to wear long pants and closed-toed shoes when coming to the site. Once at Apex, our tours opened with a detailed description of potential hazards that visitors could encounter, including asbestos, rusty metal artifacts, broken glass, and tripping hazards such as buried wires. Visitors are allowed to pick up and investigate artifacts with these warnings in mind (with the exception of asbestos), but are also advised to be aware of tarantulas, tarantula hawks, scorpions, lizards, and snakes known to warm up in and around metal containers. Fortunately, only one fairly aloof tarantula has thus far been encountered during tours. Visitors are also reminded to stay hydrated, take rests whenever needed, and to wear sunscreen.

Advisories concerning the proper traversal of the site were also provided. Between 2022 and 2023, 168 people formally participated in Apex tours, but this number does not include informal visitors who may visit the site outside of the field season. To best avoid damaging the site through accelerated erosion via foot traffic, and to discourage the formation of social trails, visitors were instructed to follow single-file behind the tour guides along predefined game trails where available. These are the same trails and paths used by field staff

and students when working at the site. Upon reaching a tour stop, visitors were encouraged to disperse and explore the assemblage of the area, but not to wander too far. In some cases, this proved to be difficult to enforce, which may be addressed in the future by making locus boundaries clearer to members of the public, or by only allowing visitor dispersal in smaller areas.

In both 2022 and 2023, tours visited very similar locations deemed by staff to be interesting due to their well-known function, intact structures, archaeological value, or “cool stuff,” a technical archaeological term. For example, each year, tours visited the laborer’s bunkhouse, kitchen/dining hall area, the railroad grade, the schoolhouse, and several trash dumps (Fig. 22-3). In 2023, Tim incorporated more technology into our tours to give visitors a better sense of the scale of the site and the archaeological work being conducted. Prior to departing the Welcome Center, Tim showed visitors a digital map of all currently-known locus locations, with tour-specific stops denoted by red triangles (Figure 22-1). This map was made using QGIS with spatial data provided by USFS Kaibab National Forest archaeologists during the 2022 field season and was then exported to a format compatible with Avenza Maps. As Avenza is a multi-platform and free program available for



Fig. 22-3. Visitors and survey crews at various Apex sites.

smartphones, visitors can be provided a copy of the map for their own use upon request.

Tim's 2023 tours provide a good overview of the tour information, format, activities, and modifications. First, visitors were led to Locus E where Emily and students were recording artifacts and excavating a depression at the laborer bunkhouse. Here, tour attendees learned about what kind of work the field students were doing, granting them insight into the types of activities archaeologists perform. Visitors often asked questions regarding the ethnicity of the laborers at Apex, the division of the site between management and laborers on either side of the tracks, how many individuals lived there at any given time, and other insightful and challenging questions to consider. After the first few tours, field school students became much more eager to answer the public's questions and to inform them of their own theories and research interests based on their personal interests and observations on the site.

From there, the tour proceeded to the numerous wood scatters and artifact concentrations at Locus A, defined broadly as the kitchen area. This area provided a good opportunity to demonstrate the kinds of structural foundations typically seen at Apex, the foodstuffs that members of the community would have consumed, and the technology, such as the three stoves in the area, they would have used to prepare meals. However, the large size of Locus A added a substantial amount of time to the tour, mostly from walking and encouraging visitors to explore the area. This fact, coupled with the discovery of food preparation appliances elsewhere on the site, prompted Tim to drop Locus A from the tour schedule after the first three tours, in order to focus on smaller areas with denser assemblages.

Tour attendees were then taken across the road to Locus Q, the locomotive maintenance pit. This stop of the tour engendered questions about the role of the Grand Canyon Railway in the history and development of Apex, and visitors were excited to see fragments of tools and equipment used in the engineering and servicing of trains.

The tour next proceeded across the tracks to Locus I, the schoolhouse. Along the way, tour attendees could see wood scatters and other structural remains indicating housing and activities associated with domestic life for Apex's administrators. Locus I represents the most

substantial foundations seen at the site, and is also one of the few places where the role of women and children at Apex is readily visible. The density of the artifact assemblage at Locus I is much lower compared to other areas of the tour, so here we focused on sharing information such as the names and personalities of Apex's three schoolteachers, how many students would have attended at one time, and the school's status as one of two unsegregated schools in northern Arizona at the time.

Finally, the tour concluded at Locus G, one of Apex's largest trash dumps, associated with management housing and activity. Visitors reacted in disbelief at the size of the refuse scatter and were challenged by Tim and the field school students to find specific items within the concentration. This kept them engaged up to the end of the tour as they searched for artifacts such as a wooden paintbrush (with some intact bristles) and a windup toy tractor (**Fig. 22-4**).

As visitors returned to the Apex Welcome Center for departure, Tim offered optional surveys with questions that form the basis of our visitor data. While filling out surveys or waiting for their tourmates to finish theirs, visitors would continue to ask questions, review the educational brochures, use the facilities, and refill water. Those who caravanned into the site with our tour guide, were escorted back out to Highway 64 and sent on their way. It is our hope that these tours will continue to involve and improve alongside our understanding of Apex and of historical archaeology in northern Arizona.

The voluntary and anonymous survey filled out by visitors help us assess our tours and improve them for the future. They were asked:

- Where are you visiting from?
- Why did you visit the site today?
- Rate your interest in archaeology (1-5)
- What was the most interesting thing you learned, saw, or did today?

And, for the 2023 season,

- Do you have any suggestions for future tours?

Overall, we had a nearly 87% completion rate; 146 out of 168 visitors filled out surveys. The information gathered from the surveys tells us a lot about who visited, why they visited, and what they learned. Joey McCauley, an undergraduate student at Northern Arizona University, analyzed our 2022 survey data as part of her Interns-to-Scholars internship.



Fig. 22-4. Representative artifacts found at Apex. Top row: Schoolhouse foundations (right), toy tractor (center), Locus G can dump (left). Bottom row: Orange Crush bottle from Flagstaff (right), Neutrowound radio part (center), Pepsodent toothpaste tube (left).

The vast majority of visitors over both years were from nearby towns in Coconino County, most especially from Tusayan, Flagstaff, Williams, Grand Canyon Village, Parks, and Grand Canyon Junction (formerly Valle). High numbers of visitors from the Grand Canyon area visited in 2022 (25%), likely due to the number of visitors from the Grand Canyon Historical Society, and from Williams/Parks (33%), likely from the two Kaibab National Forest Service tours. The number of Flagstaff visitors was much higher in 2023 (54%), likely due to the tours organized through the Flagstaff Festival of Science, Girl Scouts, and Flagstaff National Monuments.

Tourists also visited from elsewhere in Arizona, including Tucson, the Phoenix area, and the Sedona area, with a much higher number in 2023 due to the visit by the Questers' Sedona Chapter. We did get some tourists from outside the state, including one visitor each from Utah, Washington, Texas, Vermont, Maryland, North Carolina, and Oklahoma, and two visitors from New Mexico.

Unsurprisingly, people rated their interest in archaeology highly in both years. On a scale where "5"

is a high score, most reported a 5 (60% and 66%) or 4 (32% and 24%). Still, five people in both years ranked their interest as a 3, and two people in 2022 and one in 2023 only had an interest level of 2. No one reported an interest level of 1 ("Not at all interested").

For those with higher levels of interest in archaeology, being on an active archaeological site was especially enlightening. Visitors remarked that they liked seeing the excavations and learning why we were working where we were. Two people specifically commented that they didn't know how much information archaeologists could learn from excavating privies after seeing our unit in the possible schoolhouse outhouse.

Still, even those with lower levels of interest in archaeology seemed to get something out of the tours. One person's survey questionnaire explained: "I had very little curiosity in this field before. I feel very intrigued and inspired now." Another remarked that, "Before coming here, I've never thought much about archaeology or had much interest in it, but today really opened my eyes and I thought it was so cool!"

There were clear differences between the 2022 and 2023 survey answers to the question, "Why did you visit

the site today,” suggesting a difference in advertising success. In 2022, most people expressed some interest in the area’s history (32%), or Apex specifically (17%), as a motivating factor for coming on a tour. Due to the number of tours organized through the Grand Canyon Historical Society and Arizona Preservation Foundation that year, it is likely that many of our tourists were already interested in and familiar with the history and archaeology of the area. The two tours organized with the Kaibab National Forest, one tour with Arizona Site Stewards, and a visit from NAU’s Grand Canyon Semester seems to account for the high number of people (35%) who mentioned some sort of school or work outing as their motivation.

The make-up of the visitors in 2023 skewed the visiting reasons much more towards noting a “School, Work, or Hobby Outing” as their purpose (52%) rather than for other reasons. As before, the Kaibab National Forest and the Arizona Site Stewards came to visit again, but so did archaeologists from Flagstaff National Monuments, the Sedona Questers in search of a project to fund, Girl Scouts earning their Archaeology badge, and Passport in Time volunteers working at the site. The company and organization planning the trip seemed paramount for their motivation in attending the tour than any general interest in the tour’s subject. In 2023, visitors also mentioned an interest in the area’s history (10%), Apex specifically (3%), and archaeology more broadly (15%). In both years, a few people attended tours because they were invited by family or friends (6% and 12%).

In both 2022 and 2023, more people described artifacts as the favorite thing they saw or learned about during their tour, accounting for 35% of answers in 2022 and 55% of 2023 answers. One person explicitly wrote, “artifacts = fun”. Many comments cited specific artifacts they had seen and held, such as toys, Norwegian sardine cans, Prince Albert tobacco tins, Orange Crush bottles, shaving cream tubes, a New Mexico license plate, radio parts, and a deodorant bottle (Figure 22-4). Several people even indicated they enjoyed things like the “can dumps,” “garbage,” “trash,” and “old, rusty things,” all of which have negative connotations, indicating that we successfully communicated the importance of even less-aesthetic parts of the archaeological past.

People also enjoyed learning about life in the camp (26% and 12%), the overall history of the area (18%

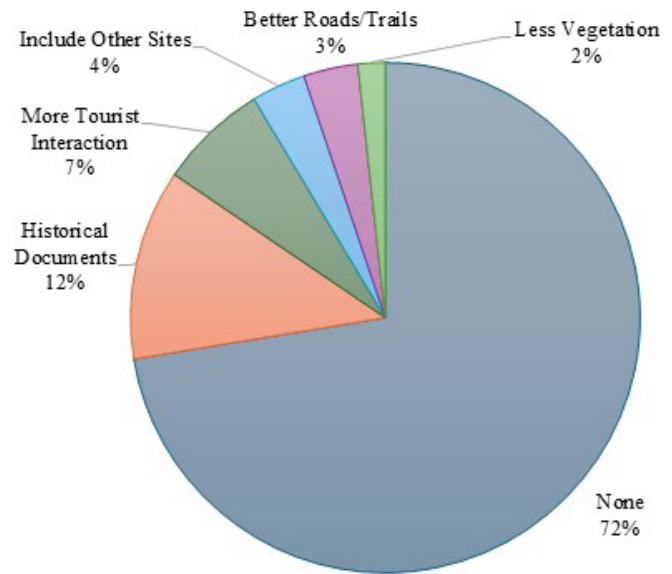


Fig. 22-5. Visitors most commonly suggested the incorporation of historical photographs and maps on the tours

and 16%), and the schoolhouse (10% and 12%) in fairly equal amounts across both years. Interestingly, eight (9%) of the 2022 visitors enjoyed visiting the still-existing railroad grade most, but no one in 2023 mentioned it in their surveys, even though the tours both years stopped along the line and maintenance pit, and in neither year was the railroad the focus of any of our archaeological research.

The newly added question requesting suggestions for future tour seasons produced interesting results (Fig. 22-5). Most people answered this question with some variation of “None”. Visitors commonly used words like “fun,” “fantastic,” “great,” “wonderful” “loved,” “awesome,” “excellent,” “amazing,” “enjoyed,” and “very cool” to describe their experiences on the tours.

The most helpful suggestion came from seven individuals who requested that we bring historical documents, such as maps and photographs, to show while at the site. The weather may also have been a contributing factor to this suggestion. Due to rain, on several tours we handed out the brochures (which contain maps and historical images) at the end of the tour rather than at the beginning. For the 2024 season, we printed laminated historical images and documents that we have since found through historical research. Four people requested more

intimate tours, with smaller groups, more stories, and more hands-on interaction with the artifacts. Two wished the tour had visited other sites in the area or related sites that were discussed during the tour. While we do not have time to arrange such tours within the confines of our current schedule, we understand peoples' interest in the surrounding area and Apex's connections across the landscape.

Less helpful suggestions included that we clear the sagebrush and juniper as the tourist was allergic to the vegetation, and that we purchase 4x4 vehicles for the dirt roads. If only we had such a budget!

While the surveys help us understand who is visiting our site and why, we also use the comments and feedback to improve our tours. We ensure that popular stops, like the schoolhouse and railroad grade, remain part of the tour, highlight new artifacts and finds based on what people enjoyed, and can tailor new versions of our educational brochures based on what people want to learn about.

For example, knowing that visitors would like to see historical documents as much as we would like to share them, motivated us to make this a priority in preparing for the 2024 season. Photographs, stories, and maps help foster connections to the past, making it feel closer, more personal, and, perhaps, more important and worthy of preservation. This is especially true at our site, which is only around 100 years old, so many artifacts and brands are familiar to modern people. One visitor commented that they loved "seeing a log cabin syrup can that I remember seeing as a child." Another helped us identify a bottle base labeled "Lavoris" as an early mouthwash based on memories of her dentist father having the brand in his practice.

More personally, on one tour, it came to light that one of the visitors' grandfather was the Apex camp cook and that his mother, had attended the schoolhouse. He told stories of his uncle's birth in Williams and being brought to Apex as a newborn. His survey noted that his favorite part of the tour was seeing his "Grandfather's wood stove." Another visitor on the same tour said his favorite part was learning from "the guy whose mom lived here," and yet another was surprised that people who lived at Apex were still alive today.

One theme we could address more explicitly with visitors is the relevance of archaeology to the present

day. While our educational brochures touch on this, several survey comments indicate that tourists enjoyed hearing about the connections between the past and present. One noted, "I learned that the settlers have about as much trash as we do and lots of waste," while another enjoyed discussions "comparing seasonal work of the modern day to the lives of work town laborers in terms of mental health and culture."

The Apex, Arizona Archaeology Project has three more years of collaborative work left on our Archaeological Resources Protection Act permit. This means we have three more years of student training, volunteer programming, and educational tours ahead of us. Since presenting this paper, we have completed our 2024 field season and look forward to analyzing the survey data from more than 100 visitors who toured the site. Our program considers public outreach as a central component of what we do, and we are committed to improving our tours. What is the use of archaeology if we aren't including the most important stewards of history in what we do?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As this is a public archaeology project, our supporters, collaborators, and participants of the past two years are the most important component of what we do. First, we must thank Margaret, Charlie, Rochelle, Kelsey, Nash, and everyone else at the Kaibab National Forest, our partner in this project, without whom this project would not exist. Second, we would like to thank Arizona Humanities. Their grant funding over the past two years has funded our tour guides, educational brochures, equipment, and port-a-potties. The research grant we were awarded from Grand Canyon Historical Society similarly paid for field equipment and funded the salary of two undergraduate student workers, one of whom presented his research at the Society for Historical Archaeology conference in Lisbon, Portugal in January 2023. We must also acknowledge the numerous participants in the field school: our field school students, Nathan, Andrew, Ian, Eva, Logan, Madeleine, Travis, Garrett, Rachel, Alex, Matthew, Sarah, Bailey, Devony, Ricky, Lorna, Makenzie, and Marc; our GAs, Ashley, Timothy, and Rachael; our Passport in Time volunteers, Adrienne, Fran,

Carl, and Shannon; our professional consultants, Bruce, Phillip, and Joe, who donated their time and expertise; and our undergraduate employees, Joey, Madeleine, Logan, and Melissa. And all of the groups who arranged tours of Apex for 2022 and 2033: the Grand Canyon Historical Society, Kaibab National

Forest, Arizona Preservation Foundation, Arizona Site Stewards, Arizona Historical and Archaeological Society, NAU Grand Canyon Semester, Girl Scout Troop #3170, Sedona Questers, Flagstaff National Monuments, and the Flagstaff Festival of Science.

