



Preliminary Overview

Passport in Time

Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project



Malheur National Forest Blue Mountain Ranger District

June 28 to July 2, 2021



Figure 1. MNF project lead discussing excavation techniques to the PIT volunteers. Pin flags represent the metal detector “hits” and surface artifacts; excavations were focused on several of the metal-detected areas and many surface artifacts were collected.

Historical Background

Grant County was established following the discovery of gold in 1862, seeing an influx of mining companies, laborers, merchants, and colonialists in the area seeking economic and land opportunities. Mining claims provided by the Grant County clerk’s office describes claims leased to Chinese and Chinese American mining companies as early as 1866. The earliest census records available in the area are from 1870 which show 940 individuals identified as Chinese in the county, representing 42 percent of the total of individuals noted in the documentation. Chinese and Chinese American individuals represented many employed miners in Grant County in the 1870 and 1880 census records, often operating under a Chinese owned mining company. The mining conveyance claims show that during this time, many Chinese and Chinese American mining companies not only leased claims from euro-American landowners, but also sold their claims for profit to varying companies in the area.

As primary documents are being researched and transcribed, more questions are being raised. Where were these mining companies living? How close or far would miners want to live from their work? Could the material cultural remains give us insight on the activities engaged in by the community? In this work, we have located habitation sites in the forms of cabins in small mining towns, community “Chinatowns”, and remote areas near mining activity.

The Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project

The Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project (OCDP) was founded in 2016 through a partnership with the Malheur National Forest and Southern Oregon University Laboratory of Anthropology (SOULA). The project has since expanded its partnerships to the Medford District Bureau of Land Management and Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site, with informal partners through the Oregon Historical Society,

and the Portland Chinatown Museum. The OCDP's goal focuses on research, collaboration, and education regarding the Chinese and Chinese American residents in Oregon's early history.



Figure 2. (Left) PIT volunteers Shana and Jane documenting and collecting surface artifacts at the Ah Yee 1 site. (Right) PIT volunteer Mary and crew lead Micaela excavating near a stacked rock feature at the Ah Yee 2 site.

The Malheur National Forest has been hosting SOULA archaeologists, volunteers, and students since 2017, including one field school in 2019, and the most recent visit in July 2021. A number of public outreach events have occurred as part of the OCDP including public lectures, outdoor public events, yearly presentations at the Northwest Anthropological Conference and the Society for Historical Archaeology Conference, and episodes of Underground History on Public Broadcasting Service affiliate station Jefferson Public Radio. In 2020, the project was awarded the Oregon Heritage Excellence Award for the efforts made to preserving Oregon's heritage. The data recovered through the OCDP has been utilized in several Master of Arts graduate theses, one ongoing doctorate dissertation, and hopefully more in the future!



Figure 3. (Left) PIT volunteers taking a much-needed break in the above 100-degree weather with our resident canine archaeologist (Stella). (Right) Crew lead Michael and PIT volunteers Peter and Mel excavating at the Ah Yee 2 site.

Passport in Time Project

Passport in Time (PIT) is a Forest Service run program which enlists the help of volunteers from around the country in preserving cultural resources, whether that be research, excavation, or interpretation. Though past PIT projects have been conducted on the Chinese and Chinese American mining companies, the Malheur has hosted two PIT projects in direct association with the OCDP. The first was held in July of 2019 in conjunction with a SOULA archaeological field school. The latest PIT project was held from June 28 to July 2nd, 2021. The project explored potential habitation sites occupied by Chinese and Chinese American gold miners during the late nineteenth century.



Figure 4. (Left) PIT volunteers Katie and Bev expanding a 50cm QTU into a one-meter test unit. (Left) Artifact found subsurface from the metal detector assisted surveying at the Ah Yee 2 site.

During this recent project, sixteen volunteers were chosen out of 63 applicants for the PIT project. These volunteers, in collaboration with Forest Service employees, excavated two sites on land associated with the Ah Yee Mining Company, operating on the Forest at around the late 1860s to early 1870s. During the five-day session, volunteers completed pedestrian survey, metal detector assisted survey, recorded and collected surface artifacts, and excavated multiple areas in each site.

Sixteen Forest Service PIT volunteers donated over 480 hours during the one 5-day session. The project's crew leads were three Forest Service interns, contributing over 60 hours to the project each!

Preliminary 2021 Results

The sites selected for this project were habitation areas located within historical mining activities on the Malheur National Forest. Each site showed definite platforms, rock features, and surface artifacts indicating human use and structural remains. These habitation areas were most likely tent platforms or cabins that would have housed at least ten miners, working in the early spring while water was still available. Early artifact analysis dates the area in multiple decades and extending past the Chinese mining occupation. Through a student master thesis, funding was provided for in depth artifact analysis this fall.



Figure 6. (Left) MNF Heritage Program Manager Don engaging in experimental archaeology. Constructed is a stove similar to those in Chinese associated habitation sites, resembling a wok stove utilized in China. (Right) MNF District Archaeologist Katee and PIT Volunteer Bev enjoying the results of the experiment! Photos courtesy of Southern Oregon University Laboratory of Anthropology.

Metal detector lanes set at one-meter wide were laid out over the extent of both habitation sites prior to the start of the PIT project. Volunteers began the session with pedestrian survey, going through the lanes marking any surface artifacts with plastic discs so as to avoid interference with the metal detectors that followed soon after. After the metal detection was completed, all the “hits” and surface finds were mapped by hand while volunteers collected the surface artifacts and replaced the discs with pin flags.



Figure 7. (Left) PIT volunteer Dave posed next to a QTU excavated in Ah Yee 2 with his crew lead Laken (Right) working on paperwork.

Following surface artifact collection, four areas were chosen to be excavated based on the “hits” and overall pattern of the metal detection. These quarter test units (QTUs) were 50cm by 50cm squares dug in systematic levels to locate and properly document artifacts. There was a total of four QTUs at the

Ah Yee 1 site and eight QTUs at the Ah Yee 2 site. Using a pin pointer, a mini metal detector wand, volunteers and forest service employees conducted metal detector probes to locate artifacts specific to metal detecting “hits”. Approximately ten were conducted at each site and included square nails, remnants of a fork, a canister lid, and an axe head!

Summary and Next Steps

The 2021 Passport in Time project enabled volunteers to become active members in the Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project. The crew worked on sites associated with early gold mining activity on the Malheur National Forest, all while learning about the Chinese immigrant and Chinese American communities in Grant County.

The OCDP and the excavations hosted by the Malheur have led to many interesting finds and plans for additional research. Grants have been applied through the University of Idaho, Moscow to fund a graduate student’s research on the Malheur, including presenting the work at the Society of Historical Archaeology Conference in Philadelphia this winter. Artifact analysis in the fall, paid for through these funds, will provide additional information about daily lives and material culture practices in a 19th-century mining camp.

One of the goals of this project is to develop, with research and analysis, a more accurate narrative about the Chinese and Chinese American community members in Oregon’s early history. The next step is to share these findings through outreach efforts including public talks, outdoor events including the Archaeology Roadshow, and volunteer events such as the 2021 PIT Project!



Figure 5. (Left) PIT volunteers Doug and Jim screening soil to find artifacts from their units. (Right) Crew lead Michael excited to find artifacts in the screen at the Ah Yee 2 site.

Special Thanks to Our Volunteers, Visitors, and Supporters!

PIT Volunteers: Diane Browning, Beverly Clement, George Collier, Jane Collier, Katie Karman, Peter Lau, Mary Magers, Mel Magers, Doug Reynolds, Dave Root, Julie Smith, Jim Withee, and Shana Withee.

Forest Service Visitors: Bob Foxworth, Dustin Hollowell, Colleen Malaney, John Lee, Kade Blood, Cody Lund and members of the Youth Native Stewardship Crew, Mary Lou Welby, and Anne Schneider.

Blue Mountain Ranger District Heritage Program members: Katee Withee, Emily Modelski, Barb Miller-Sohr, Tatiana Watkins, Shahaylie Smarr, Hannah Deming, Ashe Holm, and Jesaka Culley.

Blue Mountain Ranger District Heritage Program interns and PIT crew leads: Micaela Pardue, Laken Parrish, and Michael Porter.

Emigrant Creek Ranger District Heritage Program members: Jacob Arnzen, Austin Beger, Desiree Quintanilla, and Kelsey Maloy.

Prairie City Ranger District Heritage Program members: Marley Chynoweth, Diane Zentgraf, Cassidy Maciel, and Alicia Oliver.

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