

## HOW WE ORGANIZED THE 2006 ARCHAEOLOGY ROADSHOW: A POSTMORTEM ANALYSIS

Mary Praetzellis and Adrian Praetzellis  
Anthropological Studies Center  
Sonoma State University  
Rohnert Park  
California, USA 94928

Nearly 2000 members of the public attended this outreach event. It was held at the Sacramento Convention Center on Saturday 1/14/06 during the 2006 Society for Historical Archaeology's annual conference in Sacramento, California.

As the organizers of the Archaeology Roadshow component, we've written this blurb so that what we learned in putting it on will not be lost in the mists of time.

The session was divided into two rooms: "Step into the Next Dimension"—a high-tech media thingy put on by Archaeocommons and UC Berkeley, was downstairs; the "Archaeology Roadshow" was upstairs in a room about 60 feet on each side. There were approximately 32 participating booths and displays at the Roadshow: hands on stuff for kids, posters from the SHA meeting, displays of stuff from local archaeologists, videos...

The Roadshow was open from 1:00 to 5:00, although people were coming in from 12:30 or so. The clicker registered 1470; however, since we didn't start counting until 1:15 or so the number is at least 200 too low, maybe more. An article in the *Sacramento Bee* three days before D-Day helped the attendance.

We began organizing the Roadshow in earnest in May 2005 by creating a draft vision document for the conference organizing committee. We began to solicit participants in August from local museums, NPS units, universities, archaeological firms... we encouraged prehistorians to contribute too (which they did) as well as anyone who wanted to turn up in costume (we had about five or six in the event).

Planning for advertising the show began in October. We started by developing an easily downloaded flyer and ended up making about 3000 copies for distribution. Mike Newland eventually designed a cool color poster. We set up a website that was eventually put up on the State Office of Historic Preservation's home page. Our contacts in local museums and other organizations that do a lot of outreach were invaluable. There's no need to reinvent the wheel—these outfits already have contact lists.

We began to contact school districts in the contiguous counties in late November 2005. This is a BIG DEAL as each has its own requirement about distributing material. We should have started earlier. Grade schools and junior high schools were the most interested. If we had grade-appropriate lesson plans on the website teachers would have been more interested. We should also have contacted Boy/Girl Scouts whose leader has since commented that the event would have helped scouts get their Archaeology badge.

Two Sonoma State University grad students, Gina George and Nina Caputo, spent at least 80 hours each on publicity, some of which was paid for by the Anthropological Studies Center at SSU; most, however, was volunteered time. We spent several weekends and many evenings on the project. Our feeling is that this level of effort requires institutional backing. Volunteer labor isn't enough.

We coordinated with SHA's Local Arrangement Chair regarding the available space but soon found that we had to talk directly to the Convention Center folks. We emailed all participants in November and again in December to confirm their equipment needs—tables, electrical hookups, poster display units, etc. Internet access is very expensive so that was out. It's important to check with the facilities folk first to make sure what they will provide for free and what they charge for. We mapped out the participants' locations in the room (this was a complicated activity) and it was only just big enough to fit them all. We created several large banners directing visitors to the Roadshow and printed out several hundred, one page playbills to give to visitors.

On the day, we arrived at 8:00 to oversee set up and help people carry stuff up from the loading dock. We hung the banners, tagged each table and display unit, and assigned a volunteer to direct participants to their space. We assigned volunteers to meet and greet visitors at the entrance to the Convention Center. We assigned a tally clicker to the volunteer at the door so that we tracked the attendance. We issued volunteers with (freshly washed!) orange safety vests so that it was clear to the visitors who they were. We handed out bottled water to the participants about 90 minutes into the show.

At the end of the day we collapsed in a heap.

---

*What follows are feedback comments we got from Roadshow participants who suggested ways it could have been improved:*

- Space was a bit tight between exhibits. I would recommend that for posters more space on both sides. The person presenting the poster needs to stand to one side of the poster and perhaps have a small table for handouts.
- I heard several people say that they could not hear the videos due to the noise from the crowd. I would suggest either separating the video area to a more remote area or provide headphones. This is also a case for captions on videos. Someone had suggested we do that on *Privy to the Past*, but the suggestion came to late.
- The room was just a little too small for all the exhibits, but it still turned out great and the exhibits were fun. I especially liked the people walking around as historical characters.

- The only suggestion that I have is to make it even a little bigger! More organizations, and maybe two meeting rooms! Also, some of the multimedia stuff could have been better isolated from the rest of the crowd by temporary walls or something so that people can hear from the speakers better. What I really liked was the fact that we didn't even need to bring our freestanding display wall, because you already provided stuff like that!
- We had a great time and the staff was very helpful. Next time, you could include in the volunteer email that volunteers need to register at the conference site to get badges to wear, and provide parking options information. Otherwise, everything was really easy and smooth.
- Find out in advance the length and width of tables and let presenters know. It was a shock to get there and find the narrow narrow tables. Had to improvise and change our whole exhibit on the spot (but it turned out ok).
- Find out in advance if there are table clothes, skirts, etc. I brought something to cover the tables but I heard a few grumbles.
- Find out in advance how foam core boards, posters, fabrics, etc. can be attached to the room dividers. Push pins? Velcro strips? It'll make it less of a headache for organizers and presenters if they know what to expect.
- See if there are pull carts available to haul everything up. And try to get all presenters on one floor. I didn't find out that there was stuff on the first floor until 4:15.
- From my vantage point as a front man - the crowd was basically composed of three different groups: 1) the general public (mostly families with kids), 2) people attending the meeting, and 3) people who were attending the other event at the convention center.
- I think the advertising you did really brought in the families who I believe made up the bulk of the crowd. I didn't see the article or advertising but it seemed that it might have been geared for children as many, many families came in looking for the event.
- Having the flyers available really helped in drawing in other members of the public from the other event. As I was downstairs, I focused on informing groups of people with children about the event and that was a very successful tactic in drawing in members of the public who had not come to see our event.
- Also, having people in the lobby to direct people to the event rooms was absolutely necessary in our circumstances because the two locations where we held the event were actually rather hard to locate and with all the activity going on in the lobby, it was hard to see the signs directing people. There was one sandwich board located on the first floor directing people down the hall to the downstairs room but I never saw any other sandwich boards for the upstairs. It was not the easiest set-up to find with the huge crowd attending the other event.

- Finally, it was really great to have some really interesting displays, the games, the dogs, the computer simulations as these were specifics that I could use to entice people to come in even if they initially were not there to see the Roadshow. We're getting lots of good feedback here, too. I do have a couple of suggestions, based on what I observed, and what others are telling me. The main one would be to spread-out the hands-on stuff for kids to different areas of the room -- a co-worker tells me that she and her kids couldn't even get close to us, because we had such a large mob of kids around us. Also, if they want to try the "make-your-own-rock-art" thing, be sure to have LOTS of rocks! We ran out within the first hour...
- I'm curious to hear how many students and which districts came. Too bad we didn't think of having someone do a quick exit poll as people were leaving.
- Please pass along to the organizers who asked, from the PR perspective, to try to give themselves 2-3 months lead time to get the PR really going. If that's what we could do in a little over a month, imagine the press presence we could have gotten if we'd had another month!