The Intermontane Plateau region of North America has an incredibly rich and unique environmental and cultural history with amazing research potential. It is also home to a number of thriving American Indian Tribes who are taking an active role in identifying and protecting cultural resources. The potential to do interesting, important, and meaningful work in an atmosphere of respectful collaboration is too good to miss. Despite these opportunities, archaeological interest in the region has not been as great as we think is warranted. There has not been any significant exploration of contemporary theoretical topics or even cultural historical synthesis or interpretation for a number of decades. The outside world’s awareness of the region has in large part been centered on the archaeo-politics of the East Wenatchee Clovis find and the Ancient One known as Kennewick Man.

This situation was the main topic addressed at the Washington State University (WSU) Museum of Anthropology Plateau Conference, a special daylong seminar held at WSU on March 14, 2014. The conference included presentations by a panel of senior scholars and tribal representatives who were asked to present their views on what questions might be addressed by future archaeological studies on the Plateau, followed by lively discussions by participants with a wide range of perspectives. Here we report on the major themes discussed in this day-long “brain-storming event,” the intent of which was to inspire a new generation of scholars and to help secure the future of archaeological research on the Plateau.

Origin and Intent of the Plateau Conference

During the last half of the twentieth century, WSU was arguably the leader in archaeological scholarship on the Southern Plateau. Faculty and graduate students conducted large-scale studies along the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia rivers in conjunction with the construction of dams, as well as smaller-scale studies in the uplands. WSU graduates went on to lead programs at other schools, federal and state agencies, tribal programs, and private firms. Many of the collections associated with these projects are curated at the Museum of Anthropology at WSU (MOA).

Since the beginning of the new century, and with notable exceptions, local synthetic scholarship has stagnated. At the same time, the role of tribal participation in archaeology has grown and prospered. This growth brought valuable new perspectives and new approaches to the discipline. Much of this situation was characterized by Ken Ames in his 2009 keynote address to the Northwest Anthropology Conference, in which he noted that the Northwest has the potential to contribute significantly to current topics of global interest in archaeology, including concepts that will potentially reshape our views of North American prehistory, but also drew attention to significant problems, such as aging scholars, gaps in University curricula, and a general “erosion of regional expertise” affecting all of the regions of North America (Ames 2009).

At WSU, research into Plateau archaeology declined after the departure (because of retirement or death) of several key figures, including Richard “Doc” Daugherty, Roald Fryxell, Carl Gustafson, Peter Mehringer, Frank Leonhardy, and David Rice, among others (Figure 1). Archaeological scholarship prospered during the era of the Department’s CRM arm—first under the leadership of Randall Schalk, then Alston Thoms, William (Bill) Andrefsky, and later Ken Reid—but became less active after the closure of the unit and Bill Andrefsky’s migration to the Dean’s office. The focus of the MOA has been to get the museum in order, especially in terms of NAGPRA compliance. Organizing the large, old collections has increased our appreciation of their potential to address contemporary interests.

Recently, the MOA and the WSU Department of Anthropology have demonstrated an intent to revitalize Plateau scholar-
ship by redefining their mission to include scholarly work by MOA faculty, mentorship and recruitment of graduate students, and ongoing support for research by others. In addition, the Department of Anthropology has adopted a scholarly protocol that requires active engagement with Plateau Tribes and regular reporting of research activities directly to tribal entities.

The intent of the Plateau Conference was to advance these efforts and to foster opportunities for junior faculty, graduate students, tribal organizations, and others to formulate new scholarly work in a context that addresses the needs and concerns of the multiple entities engaged in contemporary archaeology.

Shortly after Shannon Tushingham was hired at WSU, Ken Ames contacted her with a welcome and an offer to help in the future. This came up in conversation with Mary Collins, who said, essentially, that it would be great to get a bunch of folks together to help forge a new path. So we began sending invitations but actually weren’t sure until pretty late in the game whether we could garner enough interest and financial support to make the event happen. We were hoping for perhaps 20 people. As it turned out, the response was overwhelming, with over 60 participants attending! Even so, many could not attend because they were invited so late in the game, due to the event’s rather haphazard beginnings. Regrettably, for example, we had no Canadian Plateau researchers represented, a situation we would like to remedy in future meetings.

The Plateau Conference
Like all good gatherings of archaeologists, the event was kicked off with a keg party—actually a reception and dinner the evening before the conference—during which participants
could relax and catch up with each other. We convened the next morning (March 14th) for the conference. The format began with 15-minute presentations by a panel of senior scholars (defined as individuals who earned their BA degrees before 1980) and tribal representatives who presented their views on what questions might be addressed by future archaeological studies on the Plateau (see sidebar, Figures 2 and 3). This was followed by an afternoon of informal conversation. Our overall intent was to make this an interesting and lively “brainstorming event” in a casual roundtable atmosphere (Figure 4).

Major Themes
What is the future of archaeological research on the Intermontane Plateau? What challenges do we face, what directions should we be going in, and how do we incorporate different voices and exciting new analytical techniques into our discipline? These were some of the major questions addressed at the conference.

Of course, in this short space it is impossible to comprehensively summarize the wide range of ideas and topics discussed over the course of the entire day. (For posterity’s sake, the event was video recorded). However, there were a number of key themes that we will attempt to summarize below.

Remembering Our Past
A major thread was recognizing the contributions of two Plateau scholars who had sadly passed away shortly before the conference: Richard “Doc” Daugherty and Ernest (Skip) Lohse. Mary Collins and Ken Reid honored them in their introductory remarks. Doc Daugherty, of course, was a WSU Professor whose pioneering efforts and contribution to Northwest archaeology are unparalleled. Most people in the room were connected to or inspired by Daugherty in some way—including many of his students (or students of students) and colleagues. We were also saddened to hear, just a week before the conference, that Skip Lohse—who was to be one of our panelists—had suddenly passed away at only 60 years of age. Skip was an Idaho State University professor who had contributed greatly to the archaeology of the Southern Plateau.

History and Contemporary Framework for Academic Archaeology on/in the Plateau
In the era of Richard Daugherty, who, in 1954, was the first archaeologist to be hired at WSU and one of the first in the region, archaeologists did not believe there was great time depth, population size, or significant temporal changes to the prehistory of the region. There was little consideration or protection of cultural resources. Looting, especially of graves along the Columbia and Snake Rivers, was a well-respected family pastime.
Much of the first work done by archaeologists in the region revolved around changing people’s attitudes about these resources, which resulted in increased legal protection and salvage of sites impacted by major dam and highway construction projects. Recognition of a long culture history was one of the first significant advances of the era. Until the end of the twentieth century, archaeology remained a largely academic focus with ever-expanding and changing methods and theoretical perspectives.

Today, the programmatic framework within which Plateau archaeologists operate includes not only significantly advanced analytical techniques but a community of interests that includes a strong tribal presence and an enormous effort at compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and an associated, often elusive, body of resulting information.

Academic interests have largely been maintained by non-Ph.D.-granting programs. Some of these programs have produced remarkable results and notable publications. The lack of a Plateau regional focus at any of the Ph.D.-granting institutions in the region has, however, undercut the capacity to advance regional knowledge. This situation was the basis for a call for a long-term institutional commitment to regional archaeology by Ph.D.-granting universities, with programmatic efforts emphasizing increased information sharing and synthesis, as well as training and guidance for CRM professionals and undertakings. Such a commitment, it was noted, must recognize the importance of collaborating with tribal interests and needs and using less invasive methods of study, including directing efforts at existing collections.

**2014 Plateau Conference Panelists:**
- Lillian Ackerman, WSU
- Kenneth Ames, Portland State University
- William Andrefsky, WSU
- Pat Baird, Nez Perce Tribe
- Sarah Campbell, Western Washington State University
- Steve Hackenberger, Central Washington State University
- Mike Iyall, Cowlitz Tribe
- Kevin Lyons, Kalispel Tribe
- Guy Moura, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Max Pavesic, Independent Researcher
- Kenneth Reid, Idaho SHPO
- Lee Sappington, University of Idaho
- Jill Wagner, Coeur d’Alene Tribe
- R. Lee Lyman,* University of Missouri

*Unable to attend; prepared comments read.
Tribal Collaboration and Programmatic Needs

There has been a healthy growth of tribal programs and collaboration over the years. A recurring theme, particularly with tribal representatives, was the need to incorporate tribal values, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and ethnography in archaeological studies. Furthermore, recording Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) should be part and parcel of what we do. And, in terms of compliance work, there was a call to consider the potential for archaeology outside strict project boundaries, which in CRM is commonly termed the Area of Potential Effect (APE)—in other words, to look “outside the APE box” by considering the range of possible effects that might be caused by project implementation. This should not be restricted only to archaeological site disturbance, but also might include traditional cultural properties, gathering places, and consideration of the use and feeling of place, soundscapes, viewsheds, and the like.

In terms of programmatic needs, there was a general consensus that we need to get better at publishing and disseminating our results to a widespread and diverse audience. The public, tribal, and non-professional communities appear more responsive to multi-media productions than to the more traditional academic report. We also need to ensure that data are comparable from study to study. All of these efforts, of course, will help us to synthesize on the regional scale. Another theme that emerged in conversations after the conference is that tribal, academic, agency, and CRM archaeologists are often segregated, working on their own problems and with their own colleagues. That is something that needs to be addressed. We need to share information and work on building cohorts of scholars—and hopefully this will cut across some of our institutional boundaries.

Articulating the BIG Questions

Many conference attendees agreed that, despite the rich and varied nature of Plateau archaeology, there is a general and lamentable lack of interest in the region on the national level. Simply put, the Plateau does not seem to be on the radar of many archaeologists outside of the area. So, how can the relevance of Plateau archaeology be demonstrated to the outside world? How can we recruit a new generation of graduate students to work in the region? This can partly perhaps be achieved by outlining research questions that bridge Plateau borders (and attract research funding!). As pointed out by Prentiss et al. (2005:48), Plateau studies historically have largely operated on the local scale, with regional syntheses being few and far between. Yet such syntheses are a necessary step in articulating questions of interest to a wider audience.

A constant theme in discussions about questions archaeologists should be asking was the need to expand our understanding of the temporal and spatial variation of the region. One of the most striking aspects of the Southern Plateau is that there are vastly different natural areas within a relatively small geographic area. Alpine peaks and meadows, forested lowlands, grassland prairies, deeply eroded river canyons, scorched desert landscapes, and diverse plant and animal communities speak to a cultural landscape that is far more diverse than is currently understood, with complicated systems of resource sharing. How these systems worked raises important questions of social organization, leadership, amalgamation, and conflict, as well as resource intensification and domestication, topics that currently enjoy global interest.
This relates to the general need to engage in regional (or distributive) archaeology. Because of the long history of river basin work, our sample is skewed to river basin sites, which tend to be winter settlements. Thus, our knowledge is limited to only one part of the annual settlement round. Future archaeological studies in understudied ecological zones and geographic areas (such as the uplands of the channeled scablands) could be quite productive and help us to anchor extant collections and knowledge. There was a call to look outside of regional areas and watersheds, and across state and national borders, to better understand regional patterns.

Major research questions relating to subsistence intensification, the evolution of storage, and hunter-gatherer management of plants (e.g., roots, tobacco) and fish (especially salmon) have been and can continue to be addressed in Plateau studies. While questions related to these topics have been explored for decades, new analytical techniques and theoretical perspectives promise new insight. This is especially true when synthetic efforts compare the results of extensive recent work on the Northern (Fraser-Thompson) Plateau to the cultures of the Columbia Plateau (e.g., Chatters and Pokotylo 1998; Prentiss and Kuijt 2012; Prentiss et al. 2005).

Other topical themes that were introduced and which may be more unique to the Plateau included human response to catastrophic natural events. One such event was the eruption of Mount Mazama about 7,000 years ago, which is believed to have been some one hundred times greater than that of the 1883 eruption of Krakatoa, which impacted global climate for several years. The archaeological record for the Mazama era is vastly understudied.

So, too, is the period of Euro-American contact with the traditional people of the Plateau. The interior Northwest is arguably the last period of Euro-American contact in the continental United States. While diseases may have been introduced as many as 500 years ago, horses were acquired less than 300 years ago and extensive settlement occurred only within the last 150 years. Native American survival and persistence is certainly a hot topic in other parts of the country and could also be one in the Plateau.

**Conclusion**

There is both a long history of scholarship in the region and abundant avenues for future research. Our intent at WSU is to revitalize Plateau scholarship, while at the same time recognizing that today we are working in an entirely different landscape than in Daugherty’s era. The Plateau Conference certainly gave us a lot to think about, and it will help us to map out a program characterized by collaboration with tribes, good science, an interdisciplinary approach, and a field program anchored to, and informed by, work with extant collections. It is our hope that conference participants enjoyed the collegial atmosphere of the event and that they found the discussions to be as thought provoking as we did.

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**Note**

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Northwest Anthropological Conference Annual Meeting in Bellingham, Washington, March 27, 2014.