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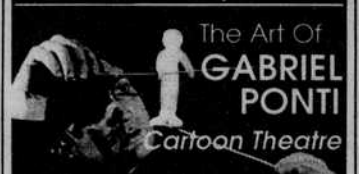

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Lecture series dusts off ancient Oregon

■ The University will host a sequence of talks that dig into the field of archaeology and explore archaic Oregon

By Brooke Ross
Oregon Daily Emerald

Archaeology is more than studying dinosaurs. The science involves studying ancient people, ideas and ways of life.

In fact, many people might be surprised to know archaeological research is conducted here in Oregon.

Over the next several weeks, the University's Museum of Natural History is presenting the Archaeological Lecture Series, five lectures designed to share the findings of ancient Oregonian peoples.

"It's a good chance to get the most up-to-date information about archaeology in Oregon," said Dennis Jenkins , lecture presenter and co-director of the University's summer archaeological field school.

The lectures began Friday evening at the Knight Law Center with a presentation by Mel Aikens, director of the Natural History Museum. His lecture, entitled "Paleolithic Thoughts," introduced the audience to ancient ideas and Shamanism, a belief held by people around the world that humans and animals are of equal intelligence, and that certain spirits can travel between worlds.

Aikens kicked off his hour-long lecture by pounding a ceremonial drum made of goat skin. He went on to introduce the subject of ancient human relationships as a preface for the next four presenters.

He said he enjoys studying relationships between ancient people and the natural environment.

"Human experience has incredible time depth," he said.

Jenkins will present his lecture, "10,000 Years at Fort Rock," Oct. 13. He will share data collected by the University's field school and present the information in color slides, showing environmental changes in Oregon's Fort Rock Basin, one of many geological resources here.

"Oregon is overflowing with information," Jenkins said. "The more you know, the more you realize how little you know."

Brian O'Neill, another lecture presenter and staff archaeologist, hopes to give people a greater understanding of archaeology.

"So often, people think of archaeology as something at some distance," he said. "When you get on a plane and tell someone what you do, they want to talk about dinosaurs."

O'Neill's presentation, "Archaeology at Our Back Door," will focus on recent findings along the Long Tom River in western Oregon. He plans to share information about ancient earth ovens and substances such as rock and charcoal that are 10,000 years old. O'Neill said such findings prove people existed and used the resources.

"Archaeology is the most eclectic of all studies," he said. "It combines social and natural science, so one can do anything."

The decades of progress made in the University's archaeology department were made possible by Luther Cressman.

Cressman, known as the father of Oregon archaeology, was hired in 1929 as the University's first anthropologist. He is credited with establishing the Archaeology department and was its first chairman.

The series of presentations are being held the next four Friday afternoons at the Knight Law Center. Admission and parking are free.

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