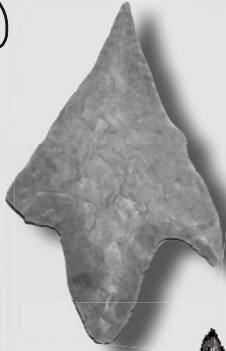


# Archaeology program unearths historical Valley treasures

## CHAPS volunteers take history and science to community



Perdiz Points from San Ignacio 700-1600 AD



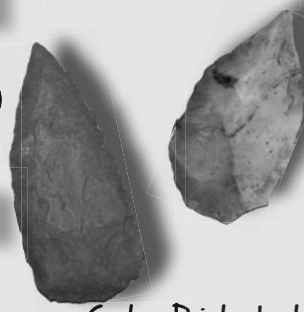
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Guerrero Points 1600-1800 AD, San Manuel Area



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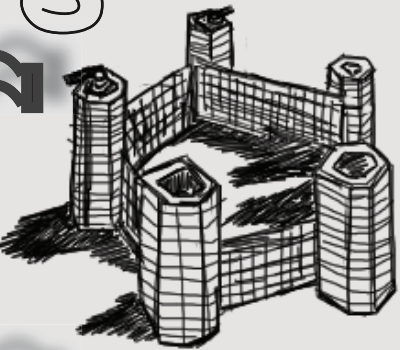
Catan Points, Late Archaic 1000-300 BC

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Badges, buttons Palo Alto battlefield

5



Fort Brown, Brownsville

**By Nadia Tamez-Robledo**  
THE PAN AMERICAN

As graduate student Sandra Salinas drew a soil auger, a geological tool used to collect soil samples, from the ground at the Palo Alto National Historical Battlefield, UTPA professor Russell Skowronek reached for the clod of dirt.

"What have we got? What does it taste like today?" he asked, breaking off a bit of the dark earth as the surrounding children grimaced and giggled. "I taste silt."

Salinas, Skowronek and other members of Community Historical Archaeological Project with Schools (CHAPS) made the cross-Valley trip to Brownsville Saturday to help local children get their hands dirty at the fifth annual Rio Grande Delta International Archaeological Fair.

"People are coming for archeology and history, and this proves that archaeology sells," Skowronek said.

CHAPS aims to educate Valleyites about the region's cultural and natural history. Faculty and student volunteers for the UTPA-based program have taken archeology to K-12 classrooms throughout Hidalgo County and events like HESTEC and FESTIBA since 2009.

Volunteers set up three stations Saturday in the white- and green-topped ring of tents at the edge of the field where the first battle of the U.S.-Mexican War was fought 165 years ago.

"We teach kids that it's not just where you live," said Maria Vallejo, a UTPA graduate history student. "It's a place you can discover and find

interesting."

While her fellow volunteers led an activity on ceramic artifacts, Vallejo spoke to attendees about land grants in present-day Hidalgo County that were awarded to families by the Spanish crown in the 1700s and 1800s.

"We try to help students discover the RGV and their history," she said. "Sometimes it's lost in the big U.S. perspective."

Vallejo is enrolled in the "CHAPS class," an interdisciplinary course called Rediscovering the Rio Grande Valley. Faculty take turns

and Northern Mexico. History and philosophy professor Sonia Hernandez is leading students as they research the Spanish land grants on which the University now stands.

"You get a circle of events that affects the border on both sides," Vallejo said of what she has learned in the course. "I love history, [and] I love learning about where I live."

In addition to community outreach, students who volunteer with CHAPS, largely members of the Anthropology Club, have taken a role in

because when an army goes into a place, things are lost, and they can help use reconstruct the battle," Skowronek explained. "[Soldiers] tasted battle for the first time here, and the last battle of the Civil War was right over there."

Archaeology Club president and graduate student Sandra Salinas was among those who traced the steps of the battle. She also participated in a mapping of Fort Brown in Brownsville, a Civil War-era stronghold that now lies beneath a golf course.

"With all the technology we used to do the mapping, we were actually able to find Fort Brown, so it was a really good day," the Edinburg native said. "That's really cool to be able to say, 'I helped in that.'"

Salinas added that CHAPS gives students interested in archaeology something more valuable than just volunteer hours.

"It's just a great thing for us since we don't have a field school, it gives us hands-on experience so that when we do start as archaeologists, we have that experience," she said.

Skowronek hopes that CHAPS will eventually be partly housed at Sharyland Estate, similar to UTPA's satellite lab at South Padre Island. He said the off-campus site would enhance their community outreach abilities.

In the meantime, Skowronek, a former professor at Santa Clara

University in California, said he's looking forward to seeing the program and the research by faculty and staff continue.

"I knew when I came here...this place screamed 'potential,'" he said. "It is a neglected part of the state, and if you think about it, it's not part of the state. And you know what? I like it that way."



American cannon, Palo Alto battlefield in Cameron County

teaching students about South Texas through the lenses of their various specialties, which span from history to the hard sciences.

Physics and geology professor Juan Gonzalez heads research that takes a look at how the Rio Grande has moved back and forth across the United States

unearthing the archaeological sites being studied in the Valley. Last May they took up metal detectors alongside the National Park Service to study the Palo Alto battlefield, picking up on everything from buttons to cannon balls that litter the plain.

"You can see the movement of the armies in a very detailed way