

West Texas Archeological Society

P.O. Box 183 Iraan, Texas 79744-0183

wtas.archeology@gmail.com

westtexasarcheologicalsociety.website

President: Tom Ashmore, Vice President: C.A. Maedgen, Treasurer: James Michael Collett

Feel free to share with friends. Membership is free. **127** members and growing!

Newsletter & Website Editor: Tom Ashmore (tcashmo@gmail.com)

January 2026



A new year: some history and what's in store for 2026

Tom Ashmore, President

Although C.A. Maedgen and I had been members of the Iraan Archeological Society (now WTAS) for some years, when Covid began shutting everything down in 2021, we had just gained access to a historic site that no other archeologists had ever seen, and it held great promise. As everything was shutting down, we were looking for organizational support, if only moral support and a reporting outlet, to conduct fieldwork. We contacted James Michael Collett, president of IAS at the time, and offered to take over the newsletter to provide us with an outlet to report on our discoveries. That series of field trips in 2021 resulted in two new sites: Camp Van Camp and Butterfield Overland Mail's Antelope Spring Station. Soon thereafter, James Michael informed everyone that his duties were coming to an end and the organization needed a new president. There were no volunteers, but C.A. and I were well into our next project, Camp Meyer Spring. To keep our supporting organization alive, we offered to take over leadership roles and continue the newsletter.

Although we were not conducting meetings or field trips as in the past, the members' interest in reading the results grew, and our in-person presentations received very positive feedback. More opportunities opened up, and more reports began to flow. That's when we decided it was time to provide a forum to archive all our work. So, we created the website. Membership grew, and appreciation was reflected in donations to our work. Some new field-smart and skilled metal detectorists joined our field project crew so we could accomplish even more. We are now in the middle of three active projects, and two more are in the early stages of working with landowners. As we get the word out, requests for presentations continue to grow (see Upcoming Events).

Our field methodology is not traditional (as taught in universities), but it has proven itself. Someone recently asked me how we could possibly get everything I reported on for Camp Shumla done with only two and a half

days in the field. I told him that we go in with a skilled crew, a good plan, and we work fast and hard, mapping everything as we go. Because this is historical archeology, we don't spend any time digging one-meter squares with trowels and brushes. We go in with metal detectors, sweep across a mapped area, flag and GPS artifacts, and document it all on the run. Before we even go to the field, we spend hundreds of hours researching, so we know precisely the area we are looking at and what we expect to find. If we find unknown or interesting artifacts, we collect them for more research, but they always go back to the landowners.

So, success brings more success. We have a method for the niche of historical archeology, and it works. Audiences find our results interesting, and we try to include the human stories behind the sites we work to make them even more interesting. As new technologies become available, we are incorporating them into the research, along with even more engaging presentations and reports.

If you are doing it right, updates should be ongoing

As you can see from our Coming Soon section below, many of our reports are getting updated. That's because our ongoing projects not only bring new information about the specific project we're working on, but they often tie back to previous projects, revealing things we didn't realize before. I want to give an example of one that we worked all the way back in 2017. That is our Butterfield Overland Mail's Grape Creek Station project, now released as an updated report.

In 2017, when we wrapped up the project on Grape Creek Station, we were confident we had covered every base to be sure of that site's provenance. Nothing has changed in that confidence. However, there was some outside consternation at the time regarding a second site claimed in Glen Ely's book, 'The Texas Frontier and the Butterfield Overland Mail, 1858-1861'. The site shown in his book was at the spring source, two miles upstream from our site. Ely is a historian and did no archeological work on the other site. He made an assumption. It wasn't until we researched the Concho Mail Station site that we found that the Ben Ficklin line added a northern route in 1870 that followed the old Butterfield Trail from Fort Concho. That got me thinking again about the Grape Creek Station controversy. In this issue, I am adding an excerpt from our update to that report to explain how the puzzle was recently solved.

Grape Creek Station #2: Two Periods, Two Stations

There has been confusion over the years regarding the station site being reported here and another site two miles upstream. What we will refer to as the second site, or Grape Creek Station #2, was reported by Glen Sample Ely in his book, 'The Texas Frontier and the Butterfield Overland Mail, 1858-1861'. It was a Grape Creek Station site that he viewed, but it was a separate station from 1870 to 1882, not 1858 to 1861.

The San Antonio to El Paso Overland Mail, also known as the Ben Ficklin Mail Line, reconstituted the former overland mail lines in West Texas after the Civil War. Their headquarters was the Concho Mail Station, located just south of Fort Concho, San Angelo, Texas. They initially built the mail line from San Antonio through to El Paso in 1868, but in 1870, they added a northern route from their Concho Mail Station and Fort Concho. That route used the old Butterfield road and stations to reach the ultimate destination of Fort Smith, Arkansas. That route ran until 1882. The main stations along the route are documented in the U.S. Postal and U.S. Army archives, but minor swing stations were not.

The primary station after leaving Fort Concho to the north was Fort Chadbourne Station, as it was in the Butterfield Overland Mail Line. Ficklin reconstituted and used as many of the old Butterfield stations as he could. However, since Fort Concho was not part of the original Butterfield route, the distances between the fort and the initial stations on both the western and northern routes were shorter than the standard spacing of swing stations. Optimum spacing was 25 miles. This shorter spacing was for both Johnson Station to the west and

Grape Creek Station to the north. The distance from Fort Conch to the old Johnson's Station was 20 miles, and the distance from Fort Conch to the old Grape Creek Station is 20.5 miles. Both stations had to be moved upstream. Johnson's Station was moved five miles upstream, but it retained the name Johnson's Station. The same route extension was accomplished for Grape Creek Station. In that case, they moved as far upstream as possible, to the spring source, two miles farther. This station must have also retained the name, since it was still on Grape Creek.

Upon reviewing Glen Ely's reporting and the imagery associated with Site #2, the route extension from the old Butterfield Station became apparent. By following the old road from Site #2 up the mesas, I found it descending off the mesa on the north side, very similar to Butterfield Hill. It turns out the two roads descending off the mesas (Butterfield and Ficklin) are only separated by a mile. The cuts for the descent are also almost identical. This is important, because the modern ranch roads coming off the mesas look totally different. Finally, the two roads intersect and continue along the path of the old Butterfield Road.



Both Roads from each station

The updated Grape Creek Station report:

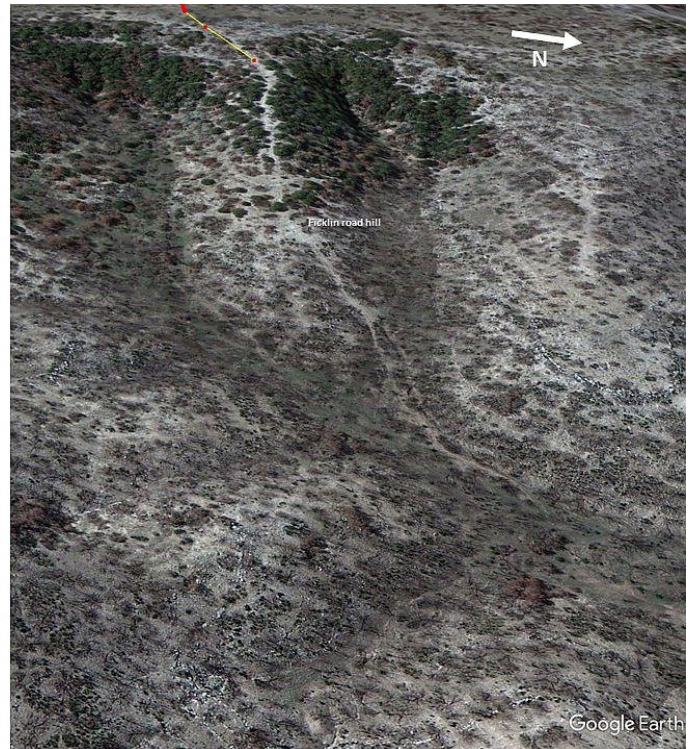
<https://assets.zyrosite.com/AzGE74rQ66UMXrKb/the-concho-mail-station-FG01D7YFLdQ35FNc.pdf>

The Concho Mail Station report:

<https://assets.zyrosite.com/AzGE74rQ66UMXrKb/the-concho-mail-station-FG01D7YFLdQ35FNc.pdf>



Zoomed in view of both roads as they reach the hill descent



Comparison of both descent hill roads

This solves the puzzle of two locations for Grape Creek Station. They were constructed for two different periods and for two different stagecoach lines. The periods were close enough to result in similar trash-type artifacts, as shown in this report and in Glen Ely's photographs.

Coming Soon!

- *Camp Meyers Spring, Fourth Edition, 2026* (currently 131 pages)
- *Butterfield Trail Through The Concho Valley and West Texas, Third Edition, 2026* (139 pages)
- *The San Antonio To El Paso Overland Mail Across West Texas, 1868 - 1886: A Journey In Historical Archeology* (combined reports: *Concho Mail Station, Head Of The Concho Station, Ficklin Ferry Crossing, Pecos Mail Station*), plus two new stations – Centralia and Middle Stations (currently 84 pages)
- **New Report: *The Jumano Pictographs at Paint Rock, Texas* (41CC1)**

Upcoming Events (field projects will be emailed separately)

Jan 13: Permian Basin Petroleum Museum, Midland, TX (noon lunch talk, ‘Horsehead Crossing’)

<https://petroleummuseum.org/>

Feb 17: Zoom session with Fort Worth Westerners, 7 p.m. (link to be sent via email), Independence Creek’s Indian Hideout/Lookout Site

Apr 10/11: West Texas Historical Association, MCM Elegante Hotel, Lubbock, TX – 1) The Jumano Picture Story of ‘The Lady in Blue’ at Meyers Spring, Texas, 2) The Goodnight-Loving Trail Through West Texas

<https://wtha.wildapricot.org/>

Apr 25: Southwest Federation of Archeological Societies’ Symposium, Amarillo, TX

May 12: Library presentation for school students and the community of Sonora, TX

May 13: Library presentation for school students and the community of Eldorado, TX

May 14: Library presentation for school students and the community of Ozona, TX

May 16: National Stagecoach and Freight Wagon Annual conference, Ft Davis, TX

Our webpage is updated regularly, with information on the home page indicating when and what has been updated. There is no logging in. Updates are identified at the top of the home page.

<https://westtexasarcheologicalsociety.website>

