



Insider's Look at Grand Canyon

Webisode #52 – Archeology at the bottom of the canyon. Transcript

Ranger Patrick Gamman: Hi, I'm Ranger Patrick, one of the co-host of Insider's Look at Grand Canyon. I'm joined by one of my fellow rangers here, and her name is;...

Ranger Graciela Avila: Graciela Avila.

Patrick: ...and today I have asked her to join us to share something really neat that she last year. So, Graciela, you are one of our Environmental Education Specialist. That means you work with a lot of kids, you do school programs during the winter, you do a lot of kid's camps in the summer and you're helping us educate the next generation. But, you were on a special endeavor last summer. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Graciela: Yes! Well, I am a part of the Interpretive Division here at Grand Canyon. So, in addition to working with children I work with the public at times. And I got to go on a trip down the Colorado River to an archeological site and help the archeologist interpret what they were finding out on an archeology dig.

Patrick: That's great! So who were these groups that were going out there to do this special archeological dig?

Graciela: Well, there was a partnership between the Grand Canyon National Park archeologists working with the Museum of Northern Arizona, which is based in Flagstaff, and Utah State University. To do research on some of the sites that are eroding and we are going to possibly lose them soon.

Patrick: So, why did they ask you to come along specifically?

Graciela: Well, a part of the funding that these groups had to do this research involved an obligation to have interpretive rangers available to bring any visitors, who would want to watch the dig happening and see the artifacts... an interpretive ranger had to be on site to take some of the river visitors through the site.

Patrick: So, you were along to interpret what these folks were going to see. They were going to see this archeological dig in action. So, I have two questions for you here; 1) what was the impetus, why now was this important to do this archeological dig and 2) once it was underway and you were helping the visitors interpret what they saw... how did that work? What did you show them? What did they get to see?

Graciela: Well, basically why they were digging these sites right now, why they were excavating these sites is because the sites are eroding. We are going to probably lose them because of the way that the river has changed. The sites are up on hills and they are basically sliding off the hills right now. So, part of the agreement was to excavate those sites that are most in danger of losing most quickly. And my role was to sit on the river and wait for visitors who came by. Invite them to come up to the sites. So, while the archeologist were digging and sifting I would walk the visitors through the site and show them what had been found that day or a few days beforehand. And we were finding rooms, buildings along with other artifacts.

Graciela: Awesome! Let's sort of paint a picture here... the time period we are talking about here, what is that era?

Patrick: Most of the sites that we were looking at dated to around 1,000 A.D. or maybe a couple hundred years later.

Graciela: So, you are showing these folks things and it is a thousand years ago at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, can you tell us some of the specific things that were uncovered.

Patrick: There were some amazing pottery vessels that were found. But, the ones that really stand out to me were pretty small; they could fit in the palm of your hand. Decorated bowls, there was one vessel that was a ducked shape vessel with a handle, and a small jar. And those were found together.

Patrick: Do we know the purpose of all of these items found?

Graciela: Not exactly, but the ones that I mentioned were found in special room that was probably a Kiva.

Patrick: Could you tell our listeners what is a Kiva?

Graciela: A Kiva is what the modern pueblo tribes use for ceremonies. It is a room used for ceremonies and also for making important decisions for the tribe.

Patrick: So, in modern times a Kiva is what shape, where is it built? Tell us about that first.

Graciela: Most Kivas, both historically and modern are usually built partially underground. They are usually circular.

Patrick: Ah... so, I think you mentioned before this interview that this Kiva was special. What made it very unique?

Graciela: This Kiva, that was found, was a little bit different style than what the archeologists normally find. It was (that) the walls were built log cabin style with stacked logs, which would have been difficult to find down at the bottom of Grand Canyon. And it was also more square shaped, whereas most normal Kivas are circular shaped.

Patrick: Did you find some other buildings down there?

Graciela: There was another area where the archeologists found a home, basically. A few rooms; storage rooms and living rooms, and evidence that people had lived in these rooms.

Patrick: So, what were they storing?

Graciela: They would have stored a lot of food. The group that lived there was probably a farming community. And so they did have, we believe there was some farmland just below a couple of the sites.

Patrick: Did you go to those fields where they might have been farming? Did anybody find anything?

Graciela: Yes! Actually, pretty interesting, some of archeologists were just sort of wandering below the site after having excavated parts of the site. They sifted some of the dirt and found some corn pollen and other plants were probably farmed in that area. And they also started overturning stones and found a few manos and matates.

Patrick: I think our public would love to know what a mano and matate is...

Graciela: A matate is a large flat stone and the mano goes along with it. It is like an ancient food processor. The mano you hold in your hand and then you put your dried corn on top of the matate and you use the mano to grind the corn.

Patrick: Nice, nice, so we found the farm fields, we found their homes, we found their special religious and government places, it sounds like you found a whole community there.

Graciela: Definitely!

Patrick: Now that you have done this journey, worked with the archeologists, got to share all this stuff with the public who is going by on boats; what is your sort of impression? You know, inside of you, how did you feel about this whole thing when it was done?

Graciela: I thought I knew a lot about archeology. I have a little background working in other parks and working at Grand Canyon with some of the archeological sites. I realized after watching the archeologists do their work that there are some many more mysteries out there! I learned so much that I didn't even understand before. I am glad that we were able to excavate these sites and learn from them before we lose them.

Patrick: Well, as the kids call you, "Ranger G", thank you for coming on the show.

Graciela: Thanks, Pat!

Patrick: We'll catch you folks next time on Insider's Look at Grand Canyon.

